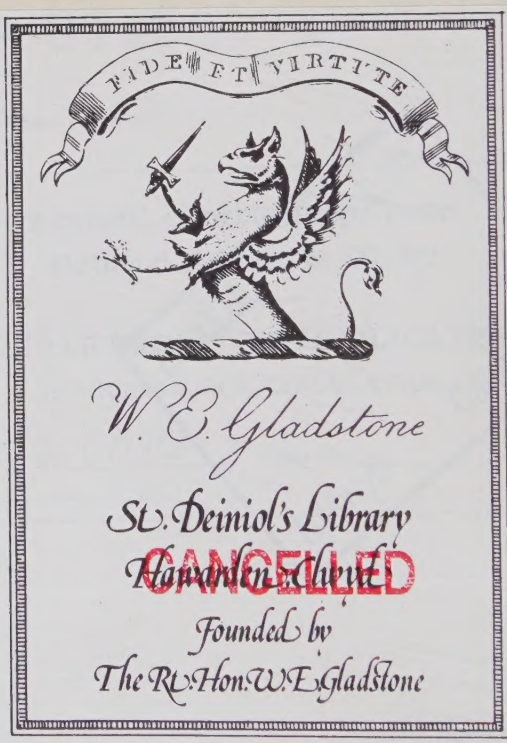
A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL LABOURER 1870-1920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A HISTORY

OF THE

ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL LABOURER, 1870-1920

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A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

1870 - 1920

BY

F. E. GREEN,

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DEDICATED TO

"THE KING."

Who is the king? The man who holds the plough!
  There in high heaven is his charter set,
  Pricked in eternal stars, tho' never yet
Has thought to rule; a thousand years, as now,
Has brought his brother bread, regardless how
  The bread was shared; and, heedlessly, has let
  Knavish usurpers wear the coronet—
The regal crown alone awaits his brow.

And humbly he will serve, and be the king;
  Bringing the clean counsels of the sunny field
Unto his Parliament, and everything
  Shall know the wholesome wind and rain, and yield
To the inspiration of the open places;
And God shall see His image in our faces.

ANDREW DODDS.

PREFACE

THE history of farming should be written by a farmer. A history of labourers should be written by a labourer. This history suffers from the defect that it is not written by a labourer. It is, however, written by one who has tilled the land for many years and has tried to survey rural England through the eyes of a farm worker. Therefore I have written this history of the agricultural labourer as a partaker of his life, rather than from the detached point of view of the spectator, or the man of the study. To my mind the only honest historian is he who is not afraid to wear his heart upon his sleeve, as Cobbett did when he wrote his *Rural Rides*. A Gradgrind historian in exhibiting his selected facts is accurate at the expense of truth.

I have tried to interest the student in a life which has been considered prosaic to the point of stolidity, by showing him that it is filled with great adventures. He will find many references to Blue Books, sufficient, at any rate, I hope, to satisfy the academic mind; but my chief authorities bear names which it would be fruitless to mention, for they are the obscure folk who follow the plough, who drive the cattle from the pastures, and who fold the sheep at the foot of the Downs. They are the unrecorded men who give us our daily bread. It is to them that I and my readers owe thanks. One day, let us hope, some Englishman, who has endured with fortitude the life on the land, with all its pain and pleasure, will tell the story as it should be told, in words of imperishable beauty.

F. E. GREEN.

Author's Note.

In the making of this book I have had the valuable assistance of Mr. Arthur W. Ashby, who has kindly read the proof sheets; and of Mr. Ernest Selley, the author of *Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries*, who has provided me with much information which has been laboriously acquired. Mr. Frederick Verinder generously put at my disposal the only complete copies in existence, I believe, of the Red Van Reports, and the *Church Reformer*. The Presidents and Secretaries of the two great unions involved, the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union, and the Workers' Union, namely Messrs. W. R. Smith, M.P., R. B. Walker, John Beard, and Charles Duncan, have allowed me free access to their books and papers; and Sir Henry Rew has helped me in the compilation of the Appendices. To all of these and to many others, my thanks are due; and I should like to add, that I alone am responsible for the statements expressed.

F. E. G.

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A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

INTRODUCTION.

When German siege guns hammered at the gates of Western civilisation and the waters of our island home were haunted with enemy submarines, then it was that a "nation of shopkeepers" awoke to the fact that the invaluable worker was he who tilled its fields. Everybody who needed bread to sustain life became alarmingly aware that it was the farm worker who was the giver. A further discovery was made by our manufacturing classes, and this was that the agriculturist was a highly skilled worker. Those who answered to the Call of the Country to perform work of national importance in the field and stockyard soon found how clumsy were their attempts at agricultural work compared with the skill of the ploughman, the shepherd, the stockman, and even with that of the "ordinary" agricultural labourer.

As we delve into history what astonishes us most of all is, that there should be any agricultural labourers surviving in our country; for though agriculture is the oldest of the crafts, since factory chimneys have flourished at its expense, it has been the least honoured and the worst paid. During the war, a Member of the House of Commons startled that august assembly with the truth steeped in irony, that it was more difficult to replace a skilled carter than a Cabinet Minister.

That we still have skilled agricultural workers amongst us we owe to their supreme quality of patient endurance,

rather than to any wisdom on the part of the governing class. Robbed of his common rights by a succession of overwhelming Enclosure Acts ; ill-nourished in his infancy and badly paid as a hired, landless labourer ; degraded by a gang system of service barely distinguishable from slavery ; deprived of any form of agricultural education ; unrecognised as a citizen until 1884 ; the wonder is that the English agricultural worker has been able to retain any of his old traditional peasant-crafts after a hundred and fifty years of divorce from the soil.

Professor Thorold Rogers, one of our greatest authorities on industrial workers, stated in 1878 that the agricultural labourer possessed five or six more qualifications to the title of skilled worker than did the artisan ; but no Government, apparently, took the slightest heed of his words. Professor Rogers might have added even more qualifications than five or six to the title of skilled worker.

There is technique displayed in even the simplest of agricultural work. You can detect it in the green-ribbed meadows when harrowed and rolled with unerring uniformity, in the dark and silver-green bands visible at the season of the year when the blackthorn flings its bridal wreath across the hedge to May. It is discernible even through a cloud of dust to the practised eye when the harrow follows the sower, and no derelict islands of exposed seed are left to tempt the birds of the air to descend in flocks and give thanks for some prentice hand that cannot draw a straight line with a team of horses.

Spreading farmyard manure, digging an allotment, or hoeing turnips, may appear to the novice to be unskilled labour. But there is skill and artistry displayed even in filling a tumbril, and dumping down the manure so that the field looks like a chessboard covered with black pawns, so regularly placed are the little pyramids of manure. The unskilled æsthete would not know that this effect was produced by spacing out these little heaps of manure six yards apart ; nor would he know by the texture of the dung if it be " long " or "short," or how to spread it so that it does not lie in wasteful lumps. The imaginative field-dresser,

as he uses his skill, is able to visualise where the full-grown grass will ripple with wavelets when caressed by the wind in June. He knows, too, where it will be so meagre that it will scarcely conceal a hare.

But it is in judging the actual time for mowing, by noting on his leggings the dust of the pollen from the bents, and the colour of the bronzing clover that he will show his cunning as a hay-maker ; and yet when he comes to build the stack then it is that he displays his supreme craft as a rural architect. With conscious pride casting his eyes over the meadow, mentally envisaging the probable weight of hay, he will mark out his foundation or steading without having passed the ordeal of the Mathematical Tripos. And as the hay is unloaded from the wagon, he, with the cunning of his eye and hand, will build his fragrant edifice so that it stands flawlessly symmetrical. As designer and executant and as one who works without the aid of pencil or paper he should as a craftsman satisfy the most fastidious of Guilds.

Finally, as a thatcher, when he crowns his edifice with a roof of golden straw, he will, if he takes pride in his work, fashion a cock out of wisps of twisted straw, and place it on the apex of the roof as an outward and visible sign of the joy he took in his work.

He will have to be deft with the adze in splitting thatching rods ; and that brings us to review the artistry and the skill of the labourer who is woodman as well as farm worker. It is surprising, considering how our woods have been left to the mercies of the head gamekeeper, rather than to the forester, that we have any skilled woodmen left in our countryside. In nearly every county are to be found men who can not only shave hoops, make hurdles and wattles, and sheepcribs during the winter months, but also work as skilled agricultural labourers on the farm in the summer.

The swinger of the scythe nowadays is indubitably a rare workman. He is more than that : he is an artist. In the peculiar bend of the sneath or handle, and in the curve of the reaping blade, one can see that it is the craftsman whose brain and muscle have been working together in perfect harmony that has eventually shaped this implement

to draw as easily through the luscious dew-sprent grass as the fiddle bow has been fashioned to draw music from the strings of the violin. Think, too, of the delicate touch of this toiler of the fields as he sharpens the blade and lightly rubs it with that finishing silky touch on the ringing curve of steel.

Ever since the man with the hoe was immortalised by Millet he has been the symbol of ill-paid, unskilled labour. But hoeing is not unskilled labour. The man who knows how to use his hoe is careful not to deprive his tender nurslings of root pasturage and leave them to wilt in the sun. A field of roots can be ruined by unskilled labour, or given a new lease of life by the deft hand of the " ordinary " agricultural labourer.

He who is so glibly dubbed an ordinary agricultural labourer, understands as a rule the skilled work which, if sub-divided, would require a gardener to do one part and a navvy to do the other. This is the work of hedging and ditching. The technique of laying a hedge is not learnt in a day. The curve, the weight and the balance of the bill-hook, the slasher, and the fag hook have been conceived and fashioned by the artist-hands that have used them for generations. Think of the deliberate stroke that goes to the splitting of a branch so that it is not sundered and lives to break into leaf and fill a gap in the hedge. To be able to lay a live hedge which will break into blossom and leaf is to be able to thread a pattern the artistry of which delights the eye of any live-stock keeper.

As I look out of the window my glance falls upon a cottage roof which shelters a farm worker who, to my knowledge, has not only ploughed, sowed and reaped corn for his employer, thatched the farm ricks, painted the wagons, and broken in the colts, but he has killed his neighbours' pigs for them, doctored their sick cows, clipped their horses, cleaned out and repaired their wells, mowed their orchard grass with a scythe, planted fruit trees and driven bees into empty skeps. He has a knowledge of wild life which would make many a sportsman envious; and with his strong, deft hand he has led to the market many an un-

tamed heifer which had never been haltered. I have watched him fell with an axe a tree as thick as a stout farmer and split it into roughly hewn posts. He has even repaired the roof of the cottage he rents, as I am afraid many a labourer has had to do if he wishes to sleep in a dry bed.

Many an English flock-master and breeder of shorthorns owes his international fame to the skill of his head shepherd or stockman, who, perhaps, has given a life-long service in improving a breed of sheep or cattle on a wage of less than £1 a week.

To-day a new craftsman is taking his place on our large arable farms; and that is the tractor ploughman, who is engineer and husbandman combined. It is to the ploughman, perhaps, above all others, that the nation looks as the supreme creative artist who will redeem it from misfortune. The ploughshare drawn by the team of horses guided by the clear eye of the ploughman, clarified by the illimitable spaces that surround him, is to us more than the ram of a destroyer. Guided by hands gnarled and toil-smitten, he draws a strong line across the seared stubble. It is the impelling vivid line sought for so eagerly by every artist as he stands before the canvas at the inception of his creation. The ploughman marks out his broad line of perspective with that simple implement which has been the agricultural craftsman's chief tool for so many centuries, and with it he draws line after line until the field of mottled green and pale yellow is transformed into rich shining brown earth. When he has graven these fructifying lines of furrow, he holds in the hollow of his hand the destiny of nations. With the seed-lip slung over his shoulder, with a measured tread over the kind, crumbly earth, and with a superb sweep of the arm and easeful swing of the body, he distributes his largesse. There is precision and beauty in the sweep of his arm and his measured stride as he casts the seed, and his eye and brain work in perfect harmony. He stands before us to-day as the figure of Destiny. In his rhythmic stride and noble sweep of the arm lies the hope of Britain.

* * * * *

It is a reflection upon English literature that the history of this class of workers, possessing the greatest English traditions, which has never failed to play its part in every national pageantry of peace and war, with an ancestry as old as the manorial system, should have been left to a foreigner to write. Dr. Hasbach was the first man to write a history of the English agricultural labourer. His work has been accomplished with painstaking industry, but it contains one grave omission—a record of the revolt of the labourers of 1830, and for an account of this students should turn to the passionate pages of J. L. and Barbara Hammond's book *The Village Labourer*, 1760–1830. He also failed to describe the great lock-out of 1874.

Dr. Hasbach's history takes us only to 1894. There are certainly half a dozen pages which go beyond that year, but there are no more, and these do not profess to be more than a glance at the few succeeding years.

Very much has happened in the life of the agricultural labourer since 1894, the story of which I shall attempt to tell in these pages. I begin my history at 1870 because 1872 was an epoch-making year in the industrial life of the agricultural labourer. It was the year when Joseph Arch appeared as a force in the industrial and political life of the country.

There are two men who stand out as historical figures, from the ranks of the agricultural labouring community in the nineteenth century—William Cobbett and Joseph Arch. To understand the character of the English peasant; to understand Joseph Arch and his movement, it is necessary to realise the character of his great forerunner, William Cobbett, for what Cobbett sowed with his *Political Register* and *Rustic Harangues* in the twenties and thirties, Arch reaped in the seventies. There was much in common between the two men. Both were skilled farm workers. Cobbett, like Arch, was bred at the plough-tail. Cobbett's father when a boy went out to plough for twopence a day, and probably Arch's father performed the same skilled work at much the same wage. Cobbett, like Arch when he came home from scaring crows as a boy had to sup off bread and be content with the smell of the cheese, as his granny would tell

him. Cobbett was certainly the greater man of genius. He was greater as a man as well as a publicist, but he, like Arch, was essentially an English peasant. Both had the peasant's religious convictions. Both possessed strong domestic virtues. Neither was in any sense a revolutionist, a dreamer; neither had any interest in economic theories; but both were born fighters and hated oppression. Both became Members of Parliament.

Cobbett possessed all the prejudices, the pugnacity of John Bull. Stout of limb, girt in his dust-coloured coat and drab breeches, with round and ruddy face, combative, he stands before us a live man, a figure breathing English manhood from his bull neck to his strong argumentative chin, his firm upper lip and finely shaped mouth, his pugnacious nose, to his clear eye fired by a passion for justice and lightened by a rapier glance of irony.

He possessed the characteristics that made for popularity at that time. He had served in the Army, and had speedily risen to the rank of sergeant-major. He hated the French with their "bloody revolution." He hated Jews, stock-jobbers, and placemen. He defended bull-baiting; he promoted boxing; he encouraged matches at single-stick; and he hunted. Heine regarded him as a Philistine, which undoubtedly Cobbett was.

He was a Tory; which meant that he held by tradition certain ideals of England and English government. A man of shining honesty, he imagined that a government of men who had been given every opportunity of culture must be incorruptible. Like most young soldiers he had hardly begun to think politically. His disillusionment began when he landed in England and tried to bring to light before a Court-Martial the corrupt practices of certain officers in the commissariat department who plundered the poor private soldier.

On his first return from America after his romantic marriage he was entertained at dinner by Pitt and other Ministers of State and offered the control of a Government organ. But though Cobbett was then a Tory, he would not be bound to any party; and rich as the Government then was in secret

service funds, no Government was ever rich enough to buy this doughty champion of the labouring classes.

Though pugnacious in print, and in a public assembly, surely no husband or father was more gentle than Cobbett. There is no more tender picture of married life than that of Cobbett in Philadelphia stealing out barefooted and stopping out all night long in order to drive away the dogs with stones, who barked incessantly near the house in which his young wife lay ill and sleepless.

At one time this peasant very nearly became the uncrowned king of England. He even wrote letters for the Queen of England to her royal husband. He faced two State trials for sedition. He suffered two years' imprisonment and a fine of £1,000 as a penalty for pouring out a volume of vitriolic irony on the heads of the Government for inflicting five hundred lashes on the bare backs of English soldiers whilst a German legion stood on guard. By imposing the savage fine of £1,000 and keeping him between prison walls for two years the Government thought they had completely broken the spirit of this Free-Lance. They ruined him financially, it is true, but they never broke the power of that lance which sharpened its point upon prison walls. It struck deeper than ever into the vitals of oppression and corruption ; and when twenty years afterwards he was again indicted by the Government for sedition—this man whom Brougham as Minister appealed to, not without success, to subdue by the power of his pen the Luddite riots—Cobbett left the Court triumphant and became the First Man in the reign of the First Gentleman of Europe.

Cobbett, it should be remembered, had no organisation at his back as Arch had, and yet so great a leader was he of the rural democracy, that it was to him the Government had to turn to stay desperate hungry men from burning ricks and breaking up machinery.

At the end of his defence he threw out this defiant challenge : " My last breath shall be employed in praying to God to bless my country and to curse the Whigs to everlasting, and revenge—I bequeath that to my children and the labourers of England." But great as was his hatred of

a corrupt Government, and a brutal magistracy, of a pusillanimous clergy, his love for the suffering poor was greater. And Cobbett's splendid championship of a voteless class akin to that of serfs prevented him from ever becoming a national hero.

During his long life in and out of Parliament Cobbett never ceased from his championship of the agricultural labourer, and it should be remembered that he was to a large extent an employer of labour, both on his Botley estate and in his publishing office. "I will allow nothing to be good with regard to the labouring classes," he once wrote, "unless it makes an addition to the victuals, drink, or clothing. As to their minds, that is much too sublime a matter for me to think about." To that simple statement Cobbett remained true all his life ; and in tilting at the dragon of abuse in rural England, Cobbett had to drive his lance at a monster fed by the capacious hands of landowners, farmers, and politicians.

This John Bull had forged a weapon in the heat of a common fire in a noisy guard-room in Novia Scotia, surrounded by quarrelsome, half-drunken comrades, which made him the most powerful fighter in the England of his day, for it was there, amid the storm and stress of barrack life during his eight years' service, that Cobbett made himself a master of English grammar.

Cobbett's style was a living thing hammered out of his character. Therein lay its success. He was sincere, simple, colloquial and personal—outrageously personal. In the use of invective lay his strength. He had the commonsense of the Englishman who knows that if he is to be listened to by the people it was no use writing like Adam Smith, Ricardo or Godwin. Though Cobbett wielded his pen like a bludgeon there was no confusion about his strokes, no riot of pummelling which might become an incoherent storm of words. Though it sometimes fell on the wrong head, every blow was distinct and well-timed.

His messages to the labourers of England in his *Political Register* were eagerly read by all capable of reading in his illiterate age. Listen to this diatribe taken from *Rural*

Rides, which has become a classic of English literature. After showing that honest labourers were far worse off than felons, he breaks out with :

"Oh, you wish to keep up the price of corn for the good of the poor devils of labourers who have hardly a rag to cover them ! Admirable feeling, tender-hearted souls ! Did not—oh, oh ! care even about the farmers ! It was only for the sake of the poor naked devils of labourers. . . . This was the only reason for their wanting corn to sell at a high price ! . . ."

And Cobbett had lived through days when wheat was 120s. a quarter, and wages driven down to 6s. a week !

It was when he was mounted, riding across the English counties, that Cobbett did his finest work, and not inside Parliament.

"The ruffians," he wrote, "owing, and solely owing to my having *lost my voice at Coventry*, have kept me out of the House ; but they have not kept me out of hearing. I have since last autumn been in *seventeen counties* making Rustic Harangues, which have produced far more effect than any speeches in Parliament."

It was at one of these meetings, a stormy one, where it was resolved that Cobbett should be ejected from the room.

"I rose," he wrote with that touch of sublime egotism of his, "that they might see the man they had to put out." He was sixty years of age then, and yet he dominated the whole room. It was as the author of *Rural Rides* that Cobbett entered into his kingdom and became the St. George of the English labourer.

When elected to the House of Commons in 1832 at the advanced age of seventy, he was still the irrepressible and almost the only champion of the agricultural labourer.

John O'Connell declared that in the House "he was quite as dogmatical and downright as in his written diatribe, and he had quite as much sarcastic audacity of self-possession as though he were a wealthy patrician member of that tuft-hunting House." With the pertinacity of a Keir Hardie he moved a very drastic amendment to the Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne. He moved that all the words after "Most Gracious Majesty" be omitted ! The House

tried to shout him down, but the lust of battle was in the very marrow of his bones. Opposition only stimulated him.

"The *people*, I say, expected that some measure should be proposed by Ministers for their relief; instead of which they asked for the power of throwing the people into dungeons. (*Great confusion.*) If I be not heard I shall move an adjournment! I will not spare you one word. You shall hear every word that I have to say . . . I have a very sacred duty to perform, and if the House be determined not to hear me to-night I will certainly bring it forward to-morrow; and if the House will not hear me to-morrow, I will then bring it forward the day after. The statement that I have to make I am *determined* to make."

And he did. The House was forced to listen to Cobbett talking on a subject of which few members knew anything. The subject was the condition of the poor.

"Your religion seems to be altogether political," said a parson to Cobbett, who promptly retorted: "Very much so, indeed; and well it may—since I have been furnished with a creed which makes part of an Act of Parliament."

Behind Cobbett's bracing egotism always loomed the spectre of the dispossessed.

It seems strange that Cobbett managed to escape the pedantry of the self-educated man who sets up as schoolmaster to every living being. He seems to have plucked the bones and sinews out of syntax and made from them a living masterpiece when he sat down to write. He wrote like one talking to a friend in a gale of wind. He spoke and wrote as no one ever spoke and wrote before. We know that with his intensely English nature Cobbett repudiated all claims to genius, which he seems to have regarded as something lower than industry. But was there not after all a streak of genius in Cobbett? Who but one who had the eye of a literary genius could visualise wretched girls working in fields as "ragged as colts and as pale as ashes." Who but a genius with a colossal ignorance of philosophical writings could have written in a book on grammar: "It is the mind that lives; and the length of life ought to be measured by the numbers and importance of our ideas and not by the number of our days."

Cobbett's ambition was to write a history of England.

"We do not want to consume your time," he wrote, "over a dozen pages about Edward III dancing at a ball and picking up a lady's garter and making that garter the foundation of an order of knighthood, bearing the motto of *Honi soit qui mal y pense.* It is not stuff like this; but we want to know what was the state of the people; what were a labourer's wages; what were the prices of food; and how the labourers were dressed in the reign of that great king."

But Cobbett did something better than write history. He made history. It was his turbulent vital force surging through England in his day that swept away the worst degradations of our Poor Law administration in rural districts, and that gave the English labourer the status of a man in place of a cypher in an endless line of dependents waiting upon public charity for the right to live. No man has pictured rural England as vividly as Cobbett has done, and no one has fought more valiantly for its redemption from a soulless feudalism which neither acknowledged the ties and duties of kinship nor the right to freedom of thought and action.

He lived through the terrible year of the Labourers' Revolt of 1830, and the influence of Cobbett during that year which had so tragic an issue for the English labourer was so great that "Cobbett, who spent his superb strength in a magnificent onslaught on the governing class, might have made of the race whose wrongs he pitied as his own, an army no less resolute and disciplined than the army O'Connell made of the broken peasants of the West." [1]

Cobbett's supreme effort was made in his seventieth year. Within seven days of the scandalous trial and brutal sentence of seven years' transportation of the six Dorset farm labourers, whose sole crime was that they had sworn loyalty to a trade union, Cobbett presented at the Bar of the House of Commons a petition signed by 12,000 persons. His hand lighted a beacon which blazed over the whole of Britain.

The next year—1835—Cobbett died. In that year, a Warwickshire lad but nine years old was scaring crows for twelve hours a day for a wage of 4d. a day. His name was Joseph Arch.

[1] *The Village Labourer,* J. L. and Barbara Hammond.

PART ONE

SEED-TIME FOR REVOLT

CONDITIONS PRIOR TO 1872.

Those of us who are not old enough to have any vivid recollection of rustic life in the 'sixties and 'seventies are dependent upon the imaginative writers for our impressions of that period. When we were young the impression these writers left upon our minds was that the English farmer was either a stern and just person, or a genial, hospitable man, fond of his bottle; and the labourer, a submissive, uneducated creature, with an inordinate respect for "the gentry," and a giant consumer of beer and bacon.

Though the farmer appears in many of the novels of the period as a full-length portrait, an outline only of the labourer is sketched. More often than not he appears as one of a village chorus, for even in the novels of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, the villagers portrayed were carriers, or "tranters," wheelwrights, publicans, small shopkeepers, and dairymen or blacksmiths. The toiler of the fields by reason of his isolation and unceasing hours of labour was often deprived of entering into much of the social life of the village.

Perhaps the fullest picture we have of rural life in the Midlands is to be found in the leisurely pages of *Middlemarch*, and of an earlier date in *Adam Bede*, with its incomparable Mrs. Poyser. *Middlemarch* was published in 1872, and yet in it we get no intimate study of the men and women who form by far the largest part of the agricultural community; no indication of an unrest leading up to the climax of the "revolt of the field" of that year.

Amongst the lords of the soil who shone like stars in

Meredith's firmament there was little room for the cottager. We get a glimpse of a senile rustic like Master Gammon, or an Andrew Hedger, who "could eat a hog a solid hower." As characters the labourers are clowns, though Meredith knew full well the part they played in English rural life was something greater, for into the mouth of Matey Weyburn he puts these words:

"Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight's run in the Lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across people we call common, men and women, old wayside men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads a delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air there's no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand I have not felt the same, with 'our senators, rulers, and lawgivers.' They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind." [1]

Even Thomas Hardy, who by birth and early training had perhaps more opportunities of studying the hired farm servant than either George Eliot or George Meredith, rarely took the trouble to make him the protagonist in his novels. Gabriel Oak, the shepherd in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, was an exception, it is true, but Hardy was always too interested in the labourer's daughter to give her father a prominent place in the social setting. Nevertheless in *The Woodlanders* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* he presents us with wonderful backgrounds to peasant life in Dorset, and Hardy's perspective ranges from the 'forties to the 'eighties of *Jude the Obscure*.

If we place by the side of these novels such books as *The Revolt of the Field*, by Arthur Clayden; Mr. W. H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life*; *English Farming Past and Present*, by R. E. Prothero; Joseph Arch's *Autobiography*; *The Agricultural Lockout*, 1874, by Frederick Clifford, *The Times*

[1] *Lord Ormont and His Aminta.* By George Meredith.

Commissioner; *The English Peasant*, by Richard Heath; *The English Peasantry*, by Francis George Heath; *Arcady*, by Dr. Jessopp, or the works of Richard Jefferies, not to prolong the list, we find that the characters portrayed by our novelists, though true perhaps individually, become a little out of perspective when placed cheek by jowl with the entire race of farm workers.

There were stern and just farmers, no doubt; there were generous and hospitable farmers; there were stupid and ignorant labourers; there were labourers who consumed a good deal of bacon and ale or cider; and there is no doubt that the hired men who boarded with farmers lived well. One or two of the declining race of old labourers who still wear the smockfrock have told me of their experiences of living in the farmhouse in the 'sixties and 'seventies.

"There is nuthin' like a bit o' fat pork," remarked one of these, an Old-Age Pensioner, to me one day, "but it must be in brine twelve months, mind you. Nowadays a bootiful piece of pork is left in brine for a month, and out it come, ruined! Ah, I minds the day when I were a boy at Cutluck Farm and the missus usen to gie me a fat lump o' pork to souse in the bread and milk, and a pint o' ale to drink. No washy tea, mind yer. We never touched butter in those days; and we had pork agen inside the apple dumplin' for dinner. Ah, them was the days o' good feedin' for the likes o' we. They made good hard cheeses at the farm then. I mind once we pegged the clasp o' a field gate with a stick o' cheese as hard as a bar of iron."

Thus I, too, have met the Andrew Hedgers. But very few Andrew Hedgers who were married men living in cottages would have the opportunity of eating "hog for a solid hower" if it had to be purchased out of wages ranging from 9s. to 12s. a week. There was something lacking in the novelist's pictures of perennial harvest homes; of farm kitchens groaning under the weight of gargantuan dumplings and pitchers of beer; of patriarchal friendly relationships between master and man seated at the same board together. To get the right perspective we should have to open the cupboard of the farm labourer's wife and figure

out, as did Mr. Wilson Fox and Mr. Rowntree in later and more prosperous periods, how they fared on the contents of that cupboard.

The rural labourer, deprived of the opportunity to exercise peasant thrift through the Enclosures Acts, which from 1760 to 1867 put a fence round 7,000,000 acres over which the peasant's cow, his donkey, his geese, fowls, or swine used to graze, and from which he derived fuel for his household, fodder for his beasts, and even corn for his daily bread, had now little else to sell but his labour, and the labour of his family. It is difficult to see what course was open to him as a voteless, voiceless man, if the farmers refused to meet him, but to strike.

In spite of the fact that Land Commissioners had instructions to reserve sufficient Common land for the needs of the rural poor, even in as late a period as from 1845 to 1867 out of the 614,800 acres enclosed, the Enclosure Commissioners had only assigned 2,223 to the poor.[1] This fact alone must have been within the living memory of most of Arch's men, and no doubt it rankled in their minds, as it did in the minds of the rural poor in the days of Arthur Young, that so many acres had been enclosed, not to grow corn, but to make parks and shooting preserves for a new class of landed plutocracy.

Save where hamlets lay remote from towns on the slopes of the northern hills, or amid the mountains of Wales, the self-contained village was vanishing as fast as the stage coach.

No longer were labourers' wives baking their own bread, brewing their own beer, curing their own bacon, gathering fuel from the copse or common for their open grates or bread-ovens, or making their own wine or cider. With the abolition of the turnpikes the little village shop began to be driven out of existence by the smart provision merchants who, now that the barrier of a toll had been removed, invaded the villages.

The Reports of the Royal Commission of 1867[2] give us

[1] *Report of the Inclosures of Commons*, 1869.

[2] The Royal Commission of 1867 was appointed first to inquire into the employment of children, young persons and women in agriculture. The inquiry was extended to men workers.

at any rate an official view of the conditions of the agricultural labourer in England and Wales five years before Arch's movement.

We find the Northumberland hind then as to-day was the aristocrat of agricultural labourers, and with him might be placed the dalesmen of Cumberland and Westmoreland, the men of Durham and North Lancashire. These men, hired yearly, receiving continuous wages in fair or foul weather, boarding and even sometimes sleeping with their employers, retained some of the benefits of an old-world feudalism which the southern labourer had entirely lost, receiving nothing in its place.

He was much better fed than the southern labourer, and when married and living in his own cottage, his wife, instead of going out to work in the fields, stayed at home. The daughter, though, worked out of doors at every kind of farm work, from loading dung carts to driving horses and working in the barns.

Illegitimacy was rife, and this was largely due to the fact that cottages were scarce, bad, and overcrowded, and the hired unmarried man who wished to marry, very often the maidservant in the house, had to wait many years before he could get a cottage of his own.

There was a certain disadvantage in being paid in kind, which was a common practice in these northern counties, in that when the harvest was bad the labourer was paid in bad corn and bad potatoes.

It can be readily understood that where "living in" was the custom, allotments were not popular. The married men preferred the use of a field where they could keep a cow. The income of a Northumbrian family was reckoned at £60 9s. 6d. The children seem to have had an abundance of milk and the girls who worked in the fields developed into a more muscular race than their sisters of the south who were driven to resort to indoor industries for a living.

In Yorkshire, cash wages, as in the more northern counties, were on an average 2s. 6d. a day for the man, 1s. for his wife, and 10d. to 1s. for a child, apart from harvest earnings.

Sometimes grass land was granted for a cow in place of allotments. The old custom of hiring farm servants by the year was still fairly general, and as in the other northern counties the farm workers were more particular about keeping their children at school and there was little evidence of the prevalence of the gang system.

In Derbyshire a labourer earned on the average 15s. a week. Hired servants received £14 to £18 a year. The Dorset labourer engaged himself, like the Northumbrian labourer, for a year, receiving part of his income in kind; but unlike the Northumbrian hind he was driven to sell the labour of his family, as well as his own, at a very low price. In Dorset wages were 8s. with, and 9s. without a cottage. Married men had besides certain privileges, or perquisites. Sometimes these privileges consisted simply of cider or beer, sometimes of a potato patch ploughed and manured, or of fuel or a certain amount of wheat at or under the market price. But no farmer gave all these privileges together, and the goods when supplied were often so bad that even when allowed on a market price they were paid for at their full value. Deductions made for payments in kind were so great that the labourer often had not a shilling left after his week's work. Besides this, the employers seem to have exercised a cruel mastery over labour, in claiming the labour of sometimes the entire family at a very low wage, and if the older boys left their employers in disgust, their fathers would be given notice on the ground that the family was not large enough to do the work. In spite of the labourer being hired by the year he was paid nothing in times of illness. A man's wages, including additions from all sources, and if he was fortunate enough never to be ill, would be from 10s. to 11s.; his grown-up sons received a few shillings less, and the women who worked on the land received either 6d. or 8d. a day; but if the larger sum was munificently awarded, then the man would have to take less in allowances. Children were often forced to work with their fathers at six years old, or even younger. Without the patch of potato ground or the allotment the Commissioner failed to see how the family could earn sufficient to

support life, and the granting of allotments was not an act of grace on any one's part. It had to be paid for, often at the rent of £4 an acre in the county from which six men were transported for joining a union in 1834. The conditions of Devonshire I describe farther on, but I may say here that the Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Portman, found Canon Girdlestone's account substantially correct.

The men of Hampshire enjoyed a wage of 10s. or 11s. and the women 8d. a day. In this county, as in Dorset, women were employed weeding in the cornfields, spreading manure or picking stones.

In Kent women and children were extensively employed, especially at the hop-picking season, when every child that could walk was wanted, and it was estimated that every one over twelve years of age could earn on the average from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. a week for a period of three weeks. Cockneys made their yearly economic pilgrimage into the country for the hop-harvest. Otherwise the conditions in Kent were similar to those of Essex and Sussex, except that Sussex seems to have been free from the gang system which still operated in the counties of Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. In most of these counties children from seven to ten years of age were seen working in the fields. In south Cambridgeshire labourers received 10s. to 11s., and in the northern parts 12s. to 13s., whilst the women's wage was only 10d. and a child's from 4d. to 6d. a day. The evils of the gang system, both private and public, were very much in evidence in this county, where children of even six years of age were employed. In too many cases the Commissioner who made the Report said there was a silent understanding between farmer and labourer by which the latter was employed all the year round, and in return the labour of the wife and children was put at the employer's disposal. It is difficult to make any kind of marked distinction between this kind of "free labour" and serfdom.

In Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire conditions seem to have been slightly better, especially in regard to the employment of children of tender years, the average earnings of

a labourer being 13s. 6d. to 14s. 6d. per week. In Northamptonshire boys were employed as early as eight years of age, the man getting from 11s. to 13s., and the woman from 8d. to 1s. a day. Lincoln and Nottingham presented a contrast. There were men employed at yearly contracts of from £40 to £45 and a lower stratum of men, almost paupers, irregularly employed, moving about on the gang system, under which were also found children of the tenderest years. In one half of Nottinghamshire gangs of children went stone-picking practically all the summer, and even through part of the winter, and at eight years of age were considered old enough to lead plough horses!

In Leicestershire the standard of life was very low. Wages ranged from 11s. to 13s., and boys of nine to twelve years of age were regularly employed for ploughing, whilst those even younger were put into the fields to scare birds.

In Oxfordshire and Berkshire wages were said to range from 12s. 6d. to 14s. 6d., though this statement has been qualified by another that young men of eighteen or twenty received from 8s. to 11s. per week,[1] lads of fifteen and upwards, 5s. to 10s., whilst boys of ten or twelve received 3s. to 4s.

As glove-making and the slop clothing trade were in competition with agriculture in these counties it seems strange that women could be found to work for 8d. per day, which was the usual rate; but possibly, as elsewhere, pressure was brought to bear upon the husbands.

Shropshire presented a picture of serfdom similar to that which flourished in Dorset. Wages or allowances seemed to be a matter which depended upon the goodwill of the farmer. No contract seems to have been entered into between master and man. Hours were unlimited, and the payment for overtime took the form of a meal given or not at the pleasure of the employer. So bad were the cottages that married labourers were often boarded in the farmhouses.

In Surrey wages varied as much as from 12s. in western Surrey, to 15s. in the neighbourhood of London; in War-

[1] It was the custom in some districts in the Midlands to pay a married man a little more than a single man.

wickshire from 11s. in the south to 13s. in the northern manufacturing districts. In Wiltshire and Herefordshire they were as low as from 9s. to 11s. and in Worcestershire from 9s. to 12s. Shepherds and carters, here as elsewhere, received about 2s. a week more than the ordinary labourer.

Cheshire was then almost entirely under permanent pasture. Small dairy farmers were numerous and they lodged their regular labourers in their own farmhouses; the wives being employed to milk the cows. Maidservants appear to have received high wages and were apparently so scarce that they could have the key of the house one night a week. Cash wages, however, were low, only from 11s. to 12s., and though allotments were rare, many labourers possessed pasture for a cow. These cow pastures were common also in Shropshire, Staffordshire, Yorkshire, Rutland, Derbyshire and Wales.

Another pastoral county, Somersetshire, paid much lower wages; 8s. a week was quite common, though near Bristol 12s. a week had to be paid.

In Wales, the social standard of farmers and labourers was almost the same. Labourers were generally boarded in the farmhouse. Many small farms employed no labour at all, every member of the family working, often without wages, and the employer became himself a kind of head shepherd. Yet wages near the great coal mines were naturally higher than in other parts of Wales. In Montgomeryshire, for instance, wages ranged from 15s. to 18s. in summer, whilst in Anglesea they were only 11s. to 12s. A large number of imported children were employed and it was not uncommon for boys of ten years of age to work as servants on a farm for eight months of the year, receiving 6d. and their board.

The foregoing is a summary of the Reports of the Commission of 1867. Now we will turn to Canon Girdlestone's account of conditions in Devonshire, which historically is important, for no doubt it was Girdlestone's successful attempt to migrate labourers from the low paying to the higher paid counties which induced Arch to organise a system of migration and emigration on a national scale.

We get more than a glimpse into the labourer's life in the south-west counties of England six years previous to Arch's movement in the story of Canon Girdlestone's incumbency. Canon Girdlestone became the Vicar of Halberton, near Tiverton, in the county of Devon, in 1866. He found there labourers who were forced to live on 7s. or 8s. a week with additional allowances, such as cider for ordinary labourers, and either a cottage or an extra shilling for the carters and shepherds whose hours were longer. The price for extra work in harvest time was their supper, for seldom any additional wages were paid except in cases where the harvest work was done as piece work. Fuel was only given to the labourer when he " grubbed up " a hedge. In very many cases the peasant of North Devon was forbidden by the farmer to keep a pig, or even poultry, for fear he might steal the food for fattening them. Potato ground could only be rented by the labourer from the farmer at a rack rent—very frequently four and five times the rent paid by the farmer to his landlord.

The food of the North Devon agricultural labourer consisted of " tea-kettle broth " for breakfast. This appetising dish was made by putting into a basin several slices of dry bread which were then soaked by having hot water poured upon them seasoned with a sprinkling of salt, with the addition sometimes of an onion or half a teaspoon of milk. But milk, it appeared, was rarely obtainable, for this precious food was too valuable to waste on the labourer, and almost invariably, when there was a surplus, was given to the pig. Lunch consisted of bread and hard dry pieces of skim-milk cheese. Dinner consisted of the same fare. Supper, which was eaten at the conclusion of the day's work, consisted, as a rule, of potatoes and cabbage flavoured, when the labourer was allowed to keep a pig, by a tiny piece of bacon. Butcher's meat was enjoyed on Sundays only.

Women were compelled to work for 7d. or 8d. a day. They did not wish to do so because the wear and tear of clothes very nearly outbalanced this economic advantage, but the agreement made between their husbands and the farmer generally bound them to this form of serfdom.

The drinking water was supplied by the village brook and exposed wells, into which oozed the filth from open sewers. The labourer at that time had one privilege as a citizen ; he could vote at a vestry meeting, which was then the body to elect guardians, waywardens, and overseers. But Canon Girdlestone states that he never saw a labourer at a vestry or any other meeting.

When Girdlestone began his campaign the farmers of Halberton did not appear to be overflowing with the milk of human kindness. The Canon relates an incident of a carter who was crushed by a restive horse in his master's stable through no fault of the man.

"Through his injury he was laid up and his wages were immediately stopped by his master, who refused to give him any sort of assistance. This was not all. The man occupied a cottage belonging to his master, and being a carter he held his cottage rent free as part of the wages. During the whole of the time he was disabled he was not merely refused a single penny of his wages, but the rent of the cottage was charged to him, and the amount was deducted each week from the wages of his son, who worked for the same farmer." [1]

Other cases of callousness on the employer's part are related by the Canon, but I will cite only one of them.

A wagoner had his ribs broken by courageously rushing at a horse's head when the animal had taken fright. For two months he was confined to his bed. His employer, the farmer, refused to give him one sixpence of wages.

But apparently farmers in those days were not supposed to pay their men when they were injured, even when they were injured in doing dangerous and skilful work for their employer. One comes across such a case in W. H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life*. Caleb, the shepherd, in relating the incident to Mr. Hudson—and it must have taken place at about this period—did not feel at all resentful that the farmer paid him not a penny piece during the six weeks he was laid up after having his system poisoned by dipping sheep. His resentment was only against another, who was secretary of a benefit village club which Caleb had sub-

[1] *British Rural Life and Labour*, by F. G. Heath.

scribed to for thirty years, and who, because he had a spite against the shepherd, refused to pay him the allowance of 6s. a week due to him by the rules of the club, until forced to do so by a court of law.

However, though the villagers of Halberton had bad masters they had a good parson.

"How is it possible," he asked himself, "on such wretched wages for a man to house, to feed and clothe not only himself but his wife and children; and to pay, in addition, the doctor and the midwife when their services were required; to provide shoes, fuel, light, such incidental expenses as school fees, and, in fact, many other items which cannot be enumerated, but which entered nevertheless into the cost of living." [1]

He tried speaking to the farmers privately, but as this proved fruitless he preached a sermon which raised a terrible storm in the parish. At the time a cattle plague was raging, and he took for his text, *Behold the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle.* He asked the farmers "if they did not think that God had sent the plague as a judgment upon them for the manner in which they treated their labourers, to whom they had been accustomed to give less consideration than to their cattle."

The farmers now became offensive. When the annual tithe dinner took place it was pre-arranged that when the Vicar's health was proposed, the glasses instead of being filled should be reversed empty. After this, the Canon wrote a letter to *The Times* giving a clear statement of the wages, and of the condition of the agricultural labourer in the north of Devon.

This started the migration movement. Letters came from all parts of England and Ireland; some from employers offering better wages and homes; other containing money put at the Canon's disposal for the cost of migrating families. Then open war was declared against the Canon in his own district, not only by the farmers but also by the squires and clergy.

At the Easter Vestry in 1867 one indignant farmer told the Canon in language which cannot be printed that he

[1] *British Rural Life and Labour*, by F. G. Heath.

"was not fit to carry offal to a bear." Two or three days afterwards this extraordinary scene was the subject of a cartoon in *Punch*. The ladies of the Girdlestone family had to suffer insults; but this did not deter the brave parson from carrying on his admirable work for six years, and in that period between four and five hundred men were sent away to Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham, Kent, Sussex, and other counties. The migratory movement spread from Devonshire into Wiltshire and Somersetshire and generally with a northward tendency. Canon Girdlestone left Devonshire in June 1872 for Gloucestershire; and there is no doubt that the publicity given to the conditions of life in Devon, in the Press, paved the way for Arch's movement.

The labourer's life in the Midlands, fortunately for him, was better than in Devon. Herefordshire in 1871 had formed a Union in the village of Leintwardine where it was backed up by the Rector—a most unusual occurrence in those days. It spread over six counties and boasted of 30,000 members. "Emigration, Migration, but not Strikes," was its motto, and probably it was instrumental in raising wages in some of the Midland counties from 9s. or 10s. to 11s. or 12s. a week. This Union carried on Canon Girdlestone's work of migration by sending labourers into Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Staffordshire, where wages were a few shillings a week higher.

In Herefordshire the farm labourer in addition to his 10s. to 12s. a week would get two rows of potatoes in one of the fields, a supply of skim milk and an occasional rabbit. Meat was of course a luxury seldom indulged in. Bacon took its place. The most common dish was one called "flummery" made from oatmeal with the water drained off. The pot would be put on the centre of the table and folk would help themselves. They would dip their spoons into the jelly-like mixture and then plunge the spoon into a bowl of milk before carrying it to the mouth. I am told by one who has often eaten it that the mixture had a sour taste.

There were no stated hours of work; frequently men

would be up feeding the horses from 3.30 or 4 o'clock a.m., and working in the fields until six o'clock or dusk. The only holidays known were the hiring fairs, or the horse and cattle fairs; the only recreations were the club, or the chapel and church festivals. The very devout thought nothing of walking miles to a prayer meeting, even over the hills in bad weather.

"My father," a friend tells me, "once walked thirty miles—fifteen miles each way—to a prayer meeting. My mother would hide his boots in the attempt to prevent him from going. He read nothing but his Bible, and could recite long passages from memory. Newspapers he never read; not even for the prices beasts and wool were fetching. He got his knowledge from the ordinary market-day gossip."

Education, when obtainable, consisted of reading, writing, the catechism and elementary arithmetic.

It was usual for one man on each large farm to act as barber, cutting the hair of all the men, and even that of the farmer's family. New clothes were an event, and lasted many years. The tailor would come to a farm and stay several days. The parlour fire would be lit by the housewife and he would sit there all day by himself perched cross-legged on the table making clothes.

In the thrifty farmer's house the stockings and socks would be knitted at home from the wool obtained from his own sheep. Very little coal was burned. Fuel was obtained from the hedges and woods and those who still possessed brick ovens for baking bread cut gorse from the hills.

Courting, in Herefordshire and Rutland in those strenuous days, my friend tells me, was mostly done during the night. The lover would set out for the home of his sweetheart about nine or ten o'clock. If unexpected, he would inform her of his arrival by a shower of gravel thrown against her bedroom window. She would dress and come down, replenish the kitchen fire and make him a meal. They would spend the night thus; the man returning home in the early hours of the morning. If he

arrived at his sweetheart's house before the family had retired, the parents would go to bed and leave the couple in possession without question or chaperone!

But these idylls of casements with diamond panes were surely more often played at farmhouses than at cottages, where few daughters could boast a bedroom to themselves.

As for bed-linen, a friend of mine, Reuben Streeter by name, of Ewood, tells me he can remember sleeping under sheets "as coarse as a wagon cloth." As a boy of eleven he was made to attend to the stabling of six cart horses and help with the ploughing for a wage of 1s. a week and his food. That was in the 'sixties. By 1872 his mind and aching body were ripe for the teachings of Joseph Arch.

PART TWO

THE UPSTANDING CROP

1872

THE Revolt of the Field as the agricultural labourers' movement of 1872 has been called, was one which sprang from the agricultural labourers' cottage home with its empty larder, and from no other source. At its birth it was an economic, not a poltical revolt. It was a cry for bread, and not for votes.

"The agricultural labourer of 1873," wrote Mr. Herbert Paul, "coals and blankets notwithstanding, was worse lodged and worse fed than the cattle. . . . The wages earned did not suffice for the decent maintenance of more than a single individual. If he had a family he was dependent either upon aid from outside or at least from his own children." [1]

Indeed, it might be said that the history of the agricultural labourer from 1870 to 1914 is a story of the keen heroic edge of life endured on cash wages rising and falling between 2s. and 3s. a day.

It is true that later on its leader, Joseph Arch, despite his own early convictions, converted the movement into a political one; but there is no doubt that at the beginning of the revolt Arch himself presented a cold shoulder both to the professional politician and to the professional trade union organiser. Had he listened less to the blandishments of the politician and more to the advice of the trade union organiser, he would probably have saved his union from the wreckage of later days.

No trade union organiser came out from the towns to agitate amongst the agricultural labourers in country places

[1] *History of Modern England*, by Herbert Paul.

where chimneys were far apart and organisation not only difficult but expensive. No politician troubled about Hodge, who had no vote to give. The politician visited the vicar, the squire and the farmer, but left the labourer severely alone.

The newly enfranchised (1867) town workman and the trade unionist (1871) of the growing industrial areas who had wrung concessions of legal protection from an unwilling Liberal Ministry had, it appeared, taken little notice of farm workers until they, driven by want and long hours of toil, began to take concerted action in a form the townsmen understood.

The first note of the new movement was sounded in February, 1872, by a few labourers of Westerton-under-Weatherley, a village near Leamington, who stated their miserable condition in a letter written to a local newspaper. This letter was read by other labourers in Charlecote, near Willesbourne, and they decided to form a club. Then this club of eleven labourers sent a deputation to Barford to wait upon Joseph Arch, a well-known hedge-cutter, who had trained himself to speak with considerable force as a Primitive Methodist preacher.

Now Arch was forty-six years of age, and had apparently no political or trade union designs of any national significance, until this group of his fellow-labourers asked him to come and help them to deliver themselves out of their conditions of chronic poverty. He, like them, knew nothing about trade union organisation. They wanted to be able to buy more food for themselves and their families, and they wanted to shorten their long hours of labour. They were voteless and uneducated. They had only one weapon to use ; that weapon was the right to say, " We shall not work, we will starve outright rather than submit to our present condition of semi-starvation." But it was useless for one or two to say this. It must be one mighty shout coming from the lungs of a long-suffering race. The one weapon forged in the fire of their breasts was the Strike.

Mr. George Edwards, who was a member of Arch's Union, tells us that Arch hesitated, as he was not sure of his

class, and knew that it would be a great upheaval. Mr. Edwards says it was Mrs. Arch who persuaded her husband to respond to the call. His hesitation was natural, for he tells us that as he walked the muddy lanes towards Wellesbourne he recalled the transportation of the six men who formed a labourers' union in Dorsetshire. Perhaps he also imaged the brutal hangings of 1831 on manufactured evidence, and the end of many a village Hampden who had left his bones on the shores of Botany Bay. But just as starving men were willing to risk hanging for sheep-stealing, so half-starving men, as Arch described them, were willing to risk the boycott, the lock-out, and even imprisonment to raise themselves above the line of abject poverty. No one knew the trials of the farm worker better than Arch. He had lived on barley bread in the year that Cobbett died, because his father had refused to sign a petition against the abolition of the Corn Laws, and but for his mother's earnings he might have starved outright. He said he had often thought about the conditions of labourers whilst thrashing a hedge with a hook, or tramping many a mile in search of work, though, as for himself, he had left 9s. a week behind him for many a year, since he was famed for his skill as a hedge-cutter.

During the golden years dating from 1852, which according to some authorities ran on until 1874, the British farmers "prospered exceedingly, assisted largely by good seasons."[1] It was the period of which Gladstone said the prosperity of the country was advancing by "leaps and bounds."

During the 'fifties and 'sixties, not only did good harvests succeed each other with clockwork regularity, but farmers had the benefit of their fields being drained by pipes, which Peel was responsible for in 1846 in his measure of Government Drainage Loan to landlords at 6½ per cent.; and landlords were not behindhand in raising their rents, which they increased by 20 per cent.[2]

The farmers, too, began to reap the benefit of discoveries in fertilisers such as ground bones, guano, superphosphates

[1] *A Short History o English Agriculture*, by W. H. R. Curtler.
[2] *English Farming*, by R. E. Prothero.

of lime, and nitrate of soda. Reapers had come into use ; roads had been improved ; and railways gave the farmers the advantage of dealing quickly with the rapidly growing urban centres of population. The ghost the farmers feared—Free Trade—had been laid for a time by high corn prices which during a period of twenty years, from 1853–72 were sustained at an average of 54s. 3d. per quarter. What moral excuse the farmers had for paying low wages during this period it is difficult to imagine. Perhaps they considered no excuse was necessary, for unfortunately the suppliants for work outnumbered the jobs and the taskmasters could dictate their own terms.

Many of the large farmers in a good agricultural county like Lincolnshire, lived in considerable comfort and even luxury, as became men who had invested large sums in their farms. Some farmers had invested as much as £20,000 in their business, and kept carriages, hunters, and servants.[1] Landowners were growing rich, too, and many a palatial country house was built during this period. The rich, as represented by the landlords and farmers, became richer. On the other hand, the poor, as represented by the labourer, still remained, during these golden years, in the depths of poverty. The gulf between farmer and labourer, at one time barely perceptible, widened. The labourers were ill-fed, ill-housed, scantily clothed, uneducated, and voteless. Since the brutal repressions of 1830 and 1834, crushed in body and spirit, they had endured all in silence. That silence was now about to be broken ; and Arch knew that a silence so long maintained was a dangerous silence. Would the released pent-up feeling be expressed by blazing ricks and broken machines? The spectre of the gibbet—or of the cross—must have haunted the road which led Arch to Wellesbourne.

Wages touched as low a figure as 7s. in some of the south-western counties, and even in the industrial north they did not appear to be higher than 15s. Prices, it is true, for many commodities had fallen 30 per cent., but rents of cottages had increased 100 per cent. and meat 70 per cent.

[1] *A Short History of English Agriculture*, by W. H. R. Curtler.

Meat, though, was hardly seen on the labourer's table save on Sundays. Tea was 6s. to 7s. a pound, sugar 8d., and bread 7½d. a loaf. "Labourers stole turnips for food and every other man was a poacher."[1] Family earnings were reduced by the fact that children were beginning to be sent to school. The usual food of the labourer was potatoes, dry bread, greens, herbs, kettle-broth, weak tea, and bacon sometimes. This kettle broth seemed to have been the common food in the southern counties, so we find by the evidence collected by Mr. Austin.

And indeed the labourer was little if any better off than eighty years before. It was a mystery, says Mr. Curtler, even to farmers, how they lived in many parts of the country. But it seems to me that it was a mystery that farmers themselves could easily have solved. Small wonder was it that little children began to learn Joseph Arch's grace :—

O Heavenly Father bless us
And keep us all alive;
There are ten of us to dinner
And food for only five.

Everywhere Arch and his men could see farmhouses being enlarged, and country mansions being erected, and the labourer compelled to live in cottages which can only be described as hovels. Not only were they hovels, but the effects of the old Settlement Law were still felt in the country parishes, making landowners loth to build cottages for fear of their ill-paid labourers becoming chargeable to the parish. Not only were men kept poor, but they and their families were subjected to degrading circumstances.

Cobden tells us that "at Stourpaine, in Dorset, one bedroom in a cottage contained three beds occupied by eleven people of all ages and both sexes with no curtain or partition whatever; and that at Milton Abbas on the average of the last census there were thirty-six persons in each house, and so crowded were they that cottagers with a desire for decency would combine and place all the males in one cottage and all the females in another." Thus it was their collective will in this instance protected them from moral degradation.

[1] *A Short History of English Agriculture*, by W. H. R. Curtler.

Apparently, those who ruled cared naught for how the labourer was housed or fed.

The labourer was smarting in his spirit as well as suffering from low wages and bad housing. He was being policed in a manner he had never been policed before. The Poaching Prevention Act of 1862 made every man liable to the indignity of being assailed and searched by a policeman, without a warrant. The rural poor felt this more keenly than the physical hardships of their lives. At that time it was a very common practice for men who had been wood-felling or cutting underwood to carry home with them baskets of chips and dead wood, which were their perquisites. Women, too, who had been working in the fields cleaning turnips commonly carried home a few turnips in their aprons. This was an understood thing at a time when farmers paid them the miserable wages amounting to about a penny an hour. After the Act came into operation every village man and woman returning home from work carrying a bundle was an object of suspicion, and the police again and again waylaid honest men and women and charged them with stealing turnips, or wood, if they failed to find them in possession of game. Angry labourers would resent the indignity of a search, and a scuffle would sometimes take place, resulting in a charge of assault.

The villager has his own ethical code about poaching. There were poaching gangs, but they lived, morally, a set apart from the ordinary villager, who, whilst he regarded the regular poacher as having forfeited his claims to respectability, considered it perfectly legitimate to snare or knock over a rabbit occasionally, in order to feed his half-starving family. Arch, who said that he never poached, nevertheless admitted that

"an honest labourer would think nothing of knocking over a rabbit in the day-time if he saw it and it came in his way; and neither should I. I don't see any harm in it because in my opinion ground game is wild. The plain truth is we labourers do not believe hares and rabbits belong to any individual, not any more than thrushes and blackbirds." [1]

* * * *

[1] Evidence, 1873, Select Committee on the Game Laws.

Arch held his first meeting under the old chestnut tree at Wellesbourne on February 7, 1872. He said he expected to find thirty or forty men there, instead of which he found the place "as lively as a swarm of bees in June, and an audience of nearly a thousand." It was a swarm which had collected without the aid of a single circular or hand-bill. Farm labourers carried the glad tidings in an hour or two. Word was passed from cottage to cottage and farm to farm. The spirit of the hive was soon made manifest. All Wellesbourne village collected there, and men had walked from Moreton, from Loxley, from Charlecot, from Hampden Lucy and from Barford. The night was dark, but the men had got together some bean poles and hung lanterns on them. Arch was mounted on an old pig-stool, and to quote his own words :—

"In the flickering light of the lanterns I saw the earnest upturned faces of these poor brothers of mine—faces gaunt with hunger and pinched with want—all looking towards me and ready to listen to the words that would fall from my lips. These white slaves of England with the darkness all about them, like the children of Israel waiting for some one to lead them out of the land of Egypt."

It must be remembered that Arch was a Methodist lay preacher and the Book that he was in the habit of quoting from was the one book his hearers knew. Dressed in a pair of cord trousers, cord vest and an old flannel jacket the hedge cutter was listened to in breathless silence for an hour. A resolution was passed that a union should be formed then and there, and between two and three hundred names were taken down.

"That night, I knew," he says, "that a fire had been kindled that would catch on and spread, and run abroad like sparks in stubble : and I felt certain that this night we had set light to a beacon which would prove a rallying point for the agricultural labourers throughout the country."

It was fortunate for the newly born union that it received a full sympathetic report in the *Leamington Chronicle*. The editor of this journal, Mr. J. E. Matthew Vincent (the virtual founder of the National Agricultural Labourers'

Union), afterwards conducted the *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, which gave the union a wide publicity and acknowledged in its columns every donation sent to its treasurer.

Though this historic meeting took place in the heart of Shakespeare's England, it is doubtful if many of the men and women who raised their voices or gave in their names, had ever heard of their national poet. Certainly, we know that Mr. Richard Heath on making a visit to Wellesbourne in the same year questioned a baker's boy at Shottery within a stone's throw of Anne Hathaway's cottage if he had ever heard of Shakespeare, and the boy said he had not.

Mr. Richard Heath [1] gives us a glimpse into the cottage homes out of which streamed these men and women of Shakespeare's England. In a cottage he visited stood a great old grandfather's clock which nearly touched the ceiling. On a rack stood a number of plates of the willow pattern. The walls were decorated with religious pictures. The woman had worked continuously in the fields couching and weeding, haymaking and harvesting, picking up potatoes and cleaning turnips, for 10d. a day in summer and a 1s. a day in winter, working from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon. The little children were often left at home to mind themselves, and every now and then a baby was burnt or scalded to death. "I have known at least eight cases in which children left at home have been burnt or scalded to death," reported a Medical Officer of the Union of Warwick. "I have occasionally known an opiate in the shape of Godfrey's Cordial, or Daffy's Elixir given by the mother to the children to keep them quiet." A boy would have completed his education at the age of eight years, and be sent out to work in the fields scaring crows or minding sheep from six to six, getting up sometimes at half-past four in the morning. At twelve years of age he would be driving a dung cart.

Mr. Heath measured four old cottages standing in a row together. He said they could not have been more than eight feet wide and fifteen feet deep. Each contained two rooms. "In one I found a woman with four children and

[1] *Golden Hours*, 1872.

she was on the eve of adding to the number; they all slept, six of them, in one small room." This was in the charming hamlet of Shottery, which to-day is one of our show villages.

In the midst of this Shakespeare's England, on the 21st February, 1872, a second meeting took place under the chestnut tree at Wellesbourne. There was a larger crowd and Arch declared that "nearly every policeman in the county was there as well." More men joined the Union and a committee and a secretary were appointed. Then the following letter was drafted and served upon farmers in the Wellesbourne district:

"SIR,—

"We jointly and severally request your attention to the following requirements—namely 2s. 8d. per day for our labour; hours from six to five; and to close at three on Saturday; and 4d. an hour overtime. Hoping you will give this your fair and honest consideration."

It will be seen from this letter how old is the persistent cry for a few hours' leisure on one week-day.

The farmers treated the letter with contempt, and on March 11th about two hundred men came out on strike. It is interesting to note that the shepherds and wagoners, who were engaged by the month and who had a shilling a week more than the ordinary labourer—a shilling a week more for a seven-days week of interminable hours—did not come out. Most of the men who struck were ordinary labourers earning 12s., though there were others who were getting only 9s. or 10s. a week.

These men must have been in desperate straits before they struck, for Arch declared that there was not a pound's worth of silver amongst the lot, and nearly every man was in debt to the shopkeeper. This indeed was not uncommon in these times, for in one village Arch asked all men to hold up their hands who were in debt to the shopkeeper: and every hand was held up! The farmers expected a seven-days strike, but they were soon disillusioned. The Press took up the labourers' cause and wide publicity was given to the grievances of the agricultural workers by Mr. J. E. Matthew Vincent, the editor of the *Leamington Chronicle*,

and by the *Daily News*, which promptly sent Mr. Archibald Forbes, its war correspondent, to Warwickshire. Mr. Forbes' articles aroused so much public sympathy that money began flowing in from the public-spirited men of the towns. Urban trade unions, and the London Trades Council in particular, took up the agricultural labourers' cause.

On the other hand the half-starved labourers found an almost indescribable feeling of bitterness against them on the part of the squirearchy, the clergy, and the farming class. This rural trinity received the cordial support of the magistracy, and most of the two hundred labourers who were the first to strike had to find jobs in Liverpool, or Birmingham, or Gateshead, or emigrate to Canada.

Sir Charles Mordaunt, landowner of Wellesbourne, issued notices to quit to all his tenants who joined the Union. A placard in which the Wellesbourne farmers declared their resolution to employ no union men and to eject them from their cottages was issued and posted up about the county.

There were some notable exceptions amongst the landlord class. Lord Leigh, for instance, granted in advance the 15s., whilst others offered 14s. The spirit of the clergy is difficult to understand, especially that of Dr. Ellicott, the Bishop of Gloucester, who is reported to have said, with reference to Arch: "There is an old saying, 'Don't nail their ears to the pump and don't duck them in the horse-pond.'" To which Arch wittily retorted, "The Bishop appears to believe in adult baptism, which is contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England."

When Arch visited Blandford in Dorset, an elderly Baptist minister informs me, the Churchwardens ordered the church bells to be rung to drown the sound of his voice!

There were of course exceptions in Cardinal Manning, Canon Girdlestone, the Hon. and Rev. J. W. Leigh, the Dean of Hereford, Canon Tuckwell and Bishop Fraser, all of whom championed the labourers.

On Good Friday, 1872, a large demonstration was held at Leamington. On this day, when the martyrdom of Man was commemorated, that fashionable, residential town was

filled with a crowd arrayed in smock frocks and fustian jackets, and in shabby gowns covering the half-starved, haggard wives.

There and then it was resolved that the union should be called the Warwickshire Agricultural Labourers' Union. The minimum wage determined upon was 16s., ten hours only to be worked a day, with a four o'clock stop on Saturdays, and that all overtime should be paid at the rate of 4d. an hour, Sunday work being regarded as overtime.

So great was the throng that an overflow meeting was held in the street, at which Archibald Forbes took the chair. Inside the hall Sir Baldwin Leighton, the Hon. Auberon Herbert, Mr. E. Jenkin, M.P., Dr. Langford, of Birmingham, and Mr. Jesse Collings spoke. Here it was announced that a friend at Birmingham had sent the Union a donation of £100 through Mr. Dixon, M.P. Other cheques, varying from £50 to £100, began to flow in.

The farmers retorted with a lockout. When the lockout commenced, the Union had only 5s. in hand, which consisted of pennies and halfpennies contributed by the labourers.

The lockout lasted for about three months, when the resistance of the farmers was broken down. Wages immediately rose to 14s., 15s. and 16s. a week. By May the Union numbered 50,000 members, and it was in May that it was decided to link together the local unions formed in several counties into a National Union. Lincolnshire had, for instance, between 3,000 and 4,000 in a union; Cambridge had over 2,000, and Huntingdon the same.

This meeting of the various agricultural labourers' unions, held on May 29, was a very remarkable one. Eighty men, all bona-fide farm labourers, sat, representing twenty-six counties. Mr. G. Dixon, M.P. for Birmingham, presided. The National Agricultural Labourers' Union became an acomplished fact, with Joseph Arch as its chairman and Henry Taylor its secretary. Mr. J. E. M. Vincent was elected treasurer and Messrs. Jesse Collings, E. Jenkins, A. Arnold, and W. G. Ward were appointed trustees. The entrance fee was fixed at 6d. and the contribution at 2d. a week.

The following statement signed by the Chairman was circularised with the rules :—

" Let courtesy, fairness and firmness characterise all our demands. Act cautiously and advisedly that no act may have to be repented or repudiated. Do not strike unless all other means fail you. Try all other means ; try them with firmness and patience. Try them in the enforcement of only just claims, and if they all fail, then strike."

The immediate aim was 16s. a week for a 9½ hours working day.

The Congress was marked by a strong religious note. Indeed, an outsider coming to it might have imagined that he was taking part in some strange Methodist revival. In the first place, it passed a resolution that " the Committee believes in the justice and righteousness of their cause, and have the firmest faith that the Divine blessing will rest upon it."

As though confessing their sins these untutored men told of their privations and their hopes. Again and again there were cries of " Amen " and " Praise Him."

" The gentlemen on the platform were variously referred to as ' Honnercd surs,' ' These yer worthy gents,' ' These raal genelmen,' etc. The audience were alternately moved to laughter and tears. One delegate said : ' Sir, this be a blessed day ; this ere Union be the Moses to lead us poor men up out o' Egypt ' ; and another delegate commenced his speech with this explanation, given in a confidential tone : ' Genelmen and b'luv'd Crissen friends, I's a man, I is, I's goes about wi' a oss.' Another informed the assembly that ' King Daavid sed as ow the 'usbanman as labourers must be the fust partaker o' the fruit,' adding, 'and now he's mo'astly th' last, and loike enuff gets none at all.' Yet another, descanting on the ways of Providence, remarked that ' little things was often chus to du graat ones, and when 'e sa' the poor labrin' man comin' furrud in this 'ere movement, and a bringin' o' the faarmers to terms, he were remoinded o' many things in th' Scripters, more perticler o' the rams' horns that blew down the walls o' Jericho, and frightened Pharaoh, King of Egypt.' " [1]

When Spurgeon heard of the movement he said " it was the best news he had heard next to the Gospel."[2] But

[1] *Village Trade Unions*, by Ernest Selley.
[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, August 23, 1873.

it was not warmly welcomed by other distinguished men. The Duke of Marlborough, addressing his tenant farmers, told them that the discontent amongst the labourers was "brought about by agitators and declaimers, who had, unhappily, too easily succeeded in disturbing the friendly feeling which used to unite the labourer and his employer in mutual feelings of generosity and confidence." One wonders if the Duke had ever heard of the Labourers' Revolt of 1830? And Sir Charles Adderley, M.P., expressed surprise that "ignorant demagogues told agricultural labourers to demand from their masters *a market price for their labour.*" [1]

Early in December a meeting was held in London at Exeter Hall. Mr. Samuel Morley, who had contributed £500 towards the Warwickshire Union, took the chair, and amongst those present on the platform were Sir Charles Dilke, M.P., Sir C. Trevelyan, Sir John Bennett, Mr. Mundella, M.P., Cardinal Manning, Mr. Tom Hughes, M.P., and Mr. Charles Bradlaugh.

An incident happened during harvest time of this year which bore a sinister aspect to many working men. When the labourers in August struck for an increase of wages the officers in Oxfordshire and Berkshire placed the soldiers at the disposal of the farmers for the purpose of getting in the harvest and defeating the Union. The London Trades Council the next year successfully exerted itself to stop troops being "lent" to farmers and procured a fresh regulation explicitly prohibiting for the future such a system "in cases where strikes or disputes between farmers and their labourers exist."

It is really amazing that during the course of a year as many as 71,835 labourers should have joined the Union, when one considers not only their poverty, their chronic indebtedness to the village grocer, but also their position, which was akin to a subject race under employers and landlords who still exercised enormous powers as magistrates, as Poor Law guardians and as dispensers of charities. The hand of oppression became heavy when landlords and

[1] *Standard*, September 19, 1873.

farmers agreed that cottages which had hitherto been "free" should be let as part of a farm, and that the labourers should be subject to a week's notice. Landowners and farmers acting in their capacity as magistrates frequently disallowed open air meetings, on the ground of obstruction of the highways.

A test case was fought over a meeting held by Arch and Mr. J. C. Cox in 1873. Fortunately, the Labourers' Union briefed Fitzjames Stephen to defend them. The Chairman told Arch: "We have decided not to convict you this time, but you will be bound down to hold no more meetings in Berkshire."

"I shall not accept that decision," responded Arch. "I am going to hold a meeting to-night about three miles away." And the meeting was held without let or hindrance.

Arch mentions that outside the court there were about four hundred labourers armed with sticks which they were prepared to use had they seen their leader brought out in handcuffs.

The worst case was that at Chipping Norton, in Oxfordshire, when two parson-magistrates sentenced sixteen women to imprisonment; seven were given ten days' hard labour, and nine seven days' hard labour, and some of these women had children at the breast! Their crime consisted of daring two imported men to take away their husbands' work while they were locked-out. The only weapon they used was the tongue. This occurred at the little village of Ascot-under-Wychwood, about six miles from Chipping Norton. Chivalry was a quality not often shown in those days by gentlemen to labourers' wives, and the sentence imposed by these two clergymen was given in spite of the fact that in their evidence the two strong-looking labourers said that they had been invited by the women to come back to the village and have a drink! This they refused, and these brave fellows went to work on the farm under the protection of the police constable. The sentence of imprisonment with hard labour to respectable working women aroused so much indignation that a riot broke out in the town and extra police had to be telegraphed for. The authorities, fearing

further trouble, had the women driven to Oxford in a brake and the Amazons were safely incarcerated in Oxford Gaol at an early hour in the morning.

The sentence aroused the latent though often unexpressed chivalry of the English labourer, and a subscription was immediately raised amounting to £80 for the sixteen women, which was presented to them on their release from gaol. This was done in a magnificent manner. Two four-in-hands were driven in style to meet the women as they came out of Oxford Gaol, and they were taken right into Ascot, their return being heralded by music. The presentation of £5 to each woman was made in front of the house of the ringleader of the prosecuting farmers. One of these women is still living, and she was proud of the fact that she could read and write whilst her husband never could. She states that when *she went to prison it was the first time she ever had enough to eat in her life!*

An Oxfordshire small holder who was then canvassing for signatures to a petition to be sent to the House of Commons for the Franchise, and who was an eye-witness of the home-coming of these women, informs me that each of them was presented with a silk dress in the Union colours. He also states that one of the hotels in Chipping Norton refused to stable the horses!

Petty acts of oppression were exercised by country vicars; such as that of turning two young women out of the choir of a Buckingham church, because they spoke at a labourers' meeting.[1] One old Suffolk woman was threatened by the parson with the loss of her allotment if she allowed her barn to be used for a meeting.[2] In Clopton, Suffolk, the churchwarden gave notice that "the Society calling itself the National Agricultural Union having ordered strikes in a portion of the county of Suffolk, all members of the same in this parish have notice to give up their allotments, and will be struck off the list of parochial and bread charities."[3]

When the farmers found it was not possible to obtain

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, July 19, 1873.
[2] *Ibid.*, July 5, 1873. [3] *Ibid.*, August 2, 1873.

soldiers to take in their harvest they imported Irish labourers, luring them to Dorset by false reports as to wages, and as soon as the harvest was over in 1872 many Dorsetshire farmers lowered the wages of their men, in some cases by as much as 5s. a week.[1]

Is it any wonder that a feeling had grown up in the hearts of the agricultural labourers that there was one law for the employer and another for the employed? Had they ever read Adam Smith they would have approved of his statement: "We have no Acts of Parliament against combining to lower the price of work but many against combining to raise it." But the teaching of Adam Smith had hardly come in the way of a class whom in the eyes of many prominent persons it was dangerous to educate. "An extension of education," declared the President of a Royal Society, "would teach them to despise their lot in life instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employment to which their rank in society had destined them."

The kind of justice meted out to the unfortunate labourer of this date by a Bench consisting of landowners who were employers of labour and preservers of game is illustrated by an old Sussex J.P., who wrote his reminiscences under the title of *Eastbourne Recollections, Magisterial and Personal.*

When he was appointed to his office, the author, Mr. Graham, tells us, that Major Leonard, a magistrate, addressed him thus:

"You have now become one of our body. Always bear in mind that we belong to a Penal Bench—ours is a Penal Bench." He went on to enlarge upon the ill effects of leniency upon society at large, and that the only way of putting down offences was to administer the law with the utmost severity. "It is my plan," he continued, "always to give the whole dose. I'll be bound to say that they won't forget it in a hurry. When any one is brought before you always give him the full dose and nothing but the dose!"

[1] *Times*, September 30th 1872.

He seemed to take a rapturous delight in the phrase "utmost rigour." When a man was convicted he would turn round to the other justices and say: "Utmost rigour, I suppose?" "Oh, yes, utmost rigour," would come the answer, and having pronounced this sentence, and removed the culprit, one of them would inquire of the clerk, "By the way, what *is* the utmost rigour?"

It is not surprising that Arch began a political campaign against the mal-administration of justice by ignorant and prejudiced country gentlemen and their "squarson" associates who inflicted "the utmost rigour of the law" on a man convicted of some trivial offence who happened to be a member of the Labourers' Union; nor is it surprising that he attacked in season and out of season the Established Church, for whilst the Methodist and Congregationalists in particular helped the Union, the clergy assailed it on nearly every side.

By conducting a political campaign against the Church, though, Arch injured his cause, driving men like Canon Girdlestone out of the movement and estranging others. A few of the landed aristocracy carried on the traditions of English history by sympathising with the labourer. But it was from the towns where, as Meredith says, "the battle urges" that the labourers drew their chief financial support. Behind this gaunt army of landless men who had been patient so long stood the better paid workers and the trading classes of the towns. The inclination to strike in sectional groups became a source of weakness rather than strength to the Union. The fact is Arch did not really understand trade union work, and he resented the interference of what he called "professional trade union men," though he had to accept the help of Mr. Henry Taylor, a Leamington carpenter, who was a professional trade union man, and he became, according to Mr. George Edwards, Arch's most valuable lieutenant. As will be seen later on, Arch, though an excellent "agitator," was not a good organiser, and despite the fact that he saw the danger of political intrigue he was too much inclined to listen to well-to-do politicians who influenced him to keep outside

the trade union movement of the towns, which was then becoming a force. He mentioned with approval in his autobiography that

"Some of these gentlemen who had the good of the cause at heart warned me against having anything to do with professional agitators; Mr. Bromley Davenport, M.P., was one of those who cautioned us, and there were others who said, 'Arch, don't let this movement be complicated by trade union interference.' I had made up my mind to keep clear of them all."

It was curious that he did not seem to realise that he himself had become a professional agitator.

Farmers locked-out union men in many counties, but being unorganised they failed to defeat the men in 1872. Migration and emigration went on apace. Emigration officers scoured the countryside, and so active did they become that Joseph Arch in 1873 was invited to Canada to satisfy himself as to the better conditions of life in that freer country and to arrange for the settlement of thousands of labourers.

Arch tells us that he opposed emigration in the first instance; but it was only human to give way, seeing that his fellow-workers had a chance to breathe a freer atmosphere in a new country where they were able to till their own land. When he gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1881 he estimated the number of persons, men, women, and children, who had so far emigrated at the instance of the unions at 700,000. There is no doubt that the action of the British public, combined with that of the Colonial Governments, broke down the stubborn opposition of farmers, and the unions succeeded in raising wages by 1s. 6d. or 2s. a week and in some cases 3s. or 4s.

Although the agricultural unions won in 1872 they were to suffer a defeat in 1874 from which they really never recovered. Migration and emigration was an expensive business, depleting the funds of the National Union alone in the financial year of 1874-5 of £5,997.

The rule appears to have been to give every emigrant £1 and every migrant 10s. Canada, New Zealand, and Australia gained at the expense of English agriculture.

"It was not the idlest and wastrels who sailed, but the strongest, the healthiest, and the most industrious men in the prime of life and in the full vigour of their strength."[1]

In spite of the secret if not openly expressed hostility of farmer, landowner and parson;[2] in spite of frequent instances of miscarriage of justice and victimisation, the Union enjoyed a triumphant success for two years. Churchwardens might meanly withdraw allotments and charities; parsons might proscribe with book and bell young women for speaking at meetings, or threaten to turn an old woman out of her allotment if she allowed her barn to be used for a meeting of the labourers; but meetings continued to be held. They were held under the stars, if there was no friendly roof to shelter the men when they were gathered together; they were held on roadside wastes, in sheepfolds, in pounds or on windswept commons under the pale moon.

"The mayor has denied us the Corn Exchange," said Arch, when speaking in the open air at Newbury, "but our Heavenly Father sent us a beautiful nice fine evening, and let us have this spacious building." Nothing could deter this "ranter," who had an abounding faith in the righteousness of his cause and who believed that his mission was divinely ordained.

At a meeting at Redburn, Bedfordshire, on April 24, 1873, all the agricultural labourers of the district appeared to be assembled with their sons and wives. For three hours in a bitterly cold wind they stood on the grass of the common, and all, especially the women, listened intently as the delegates spoke.[3]

At a monster meeting held at Yeovil in June of the same year most of the men wore cards in their hats, upon which the following was printed:—

[1] *History of Modern England*, by Herbert Paul, Vol. III.

[2] "Why did not the Church of England years ago appear manifestly before the country, telling what it knew about the housing conditions, and the conditions of wages of the agricultural labourers? Why, when Mr. Arch was in the field forty years ago, did not the Church stand out and say: 'This is the merest claim of justice'?"—Dr. Gore, Bishop of Oxford, 1913.

[3] *The Revolt of the Field*, by A. Clayden.

15s. a week all the year round and no surrender.

Bands were playing, flags were flying, and arches of evergreens and flowers were erected. There were gingerbread stalls and tents where refreshments were served. Aunt Sally and other games were provided, whilst dancing and kiss-in-the-ring were thoroughly enjoyed.[1]

The Union had a splendid asset in the *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, which, though not officially the property of the Union, being owned by Mr. Vincent, championed the labourers' cause without reservation. But for its existence few of the cases of tyranny would ever have been recorded in print. It is astonishing that it should have had a circulation of 50,000 weekly at a time when it was estimated that at least 80 per cent. of the labourers could neither read nor write. The listeners to its message, for the paper was read aloud by those who could read, in chapel, cottage, and public house, must have exceeded this number many times.

It should not be imagined, however, that the whole of rural England in 1872 was given over to "agitation." The pastoral calm of Wales, and of the extreme northern counties of England were little disturbed by Arch's movement.

These were the days of opulent farming, when farmers lived by farming pure and simple, and did not have recourse to pupils or boarders for the summer, or to letting their fields abutting on to the railway line as advertising sites for Somebody's Pills or Baked Beans. Harvest Homes were still the order of the day, at which were sung, "The Vly among the Turmuts," "God bless the Puir Sheep," "A Gossipin' Wife goes Gaddin' About."

In Oxfordshire it was still possible to see the Morris Dancers at Whitsuntide going the round of the villages. These were usually eight in number, attired in white shirt and white trousers with tall black hats with plenty of gay ribbons at all points and many little bells which jangled with the movements of the dance. These dancers were generally accompanied by a fiddler and by a "Squire," or "Fool," who was the jester.

[1] *The Labourers' Union Chronicle*, June 28, 1873.

" He carried a stick with a calf's tail at one end and an inflated bladder at the other, with which he kept a clear space for the dancers, bestowing hearty thwacks upon the backs and sides of any among the crowd who encroached too much. He also collected the bystanders' contributions in a tin box. Among the dances performed was one with sticks, each man striking the stick of the opposite dancer, keeping time to the music, something after the manner of a melodramatic backsword combat, whilst there were other dances in which handkerchiefs were prominent features." [1]

There were more ploughing matches and " Fairs " than to-day, though very often the district Fair was the one annual holiday allowed to the agricultural labourer. He had other holidays, of course, such as those when he stood off for wet days, but these gave him no joy and his wife less.

In spite of the prosperity of farming, the Union had now to face its biggest battle in the struggle to win a shilling or two more wages, which resulted in the Great Agricultural Lock-out of 1874.

[1] *Fifty Years of a Showman's Life*, by Thomas Plowman.

PART THREE

THE FARMER SWINGS HIS SCYTHE

THE GREAT LOCK-OUT OF 1874.

It is difficult to reconcile the statements made by farmers and landowners at this time with those of investigators who travelled the country collecting facts. The statement made by Mr. C. S. Read, M.P., that the men's Union would prove as "tyrannical, as secret and as tormenting as the Star Chamber of old" reads like an echo of the Dorset Assizes of 1834. Such a statement though casts a flood of light on the attitude of mind adopted by the employing class and their advocates on the attempt of a landless, half-starved English peasantry trying to obtain a shilling or two more wages.

The Strike of 1872, wrote Mr. Francis George Heath, was "one of the most justifiable, yet one of the mildest on record in the history of labour disputes—a gentle revolt that enlisted the whole-hearted sympathy of the British public."[1]

Mr. Frederick Clifford, *The Times* correspondent, during the great agricultural lock-out of 1874, stated that "on the whole the conduct of the labourers throughout the lock-out was exemplary. There were isolated attempts at intimidation, and a few cases of personal violence; but considering that the lock-out extended over a great portion of the county of Suffolk, and included parts of Cambridgeshire, the men were orderly and well-behaved."[2]

On the other hand the farmers' statements as to "fire-brand methods" of the National Union received support

[1] *British Rural Life and Labour.*
[2] *The Agricultural Lock-out*, 1874.

from Mr. Simmons, the secretary of a rival agricultural labourers' organisation in Kent and East Sussex. Speaking of the tactics of the National Union before the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1881 he said that " the policy which they have adopted has been a firebrand policy of strikes and disruption." Mr. Simmons' statement, though, must be taken with a good deal of caution. In reading the evidence of this Royal Commission given by Arch and Simmons, one cannot help being struck by the blunt, fearless, outspoken statements of Arch and the self-complacent tone adopted by Simmons.

The Kent and Sussex Agricultural and General Labourers' Union started in 1872, but it never affiliated with the National Union. Mr. Simmons edited a newspaper at Maidstone which he converted into an organ for the union. His union afterwards became the London and Southern Counties Labour League, and though I have questioned old labourers who belonged to the union in 1872 and later, I cannot discover what became of Mr. Simmons. He seems to have disappeared from England, and with his disappearance during the agricultural depression the union seems to have melted away. It has been said that he was interested in an emigration scheme promoted by some peer and went to a distant colony.

If one examines the circular signed by Joseph Arch, sent to all his branch secretaries, and the wording of the letters sent to farmers by the branch secretaries or the committees, one is bound to come to the conclusion that the language used by the men, or their representatives, was not only conciliatory, but certainly more humble than trade union organisers would use at the present day. It is difficult then to understand the feeling of resentment on the part of the farmers when they received " notices," unless we bear in mind that the two classes had socially been drawing farther and farther apart, and the language used, not in the strike circulars, but by the trade union speakers at meetings, was undoubtedly provocative Labourers' sons and farmers' sons who had gone to the same Dame's school together, who talked in the same dialect in

the 'forties and shared probably the same meals together in the farm kitchen, had now become widely separated. During the golden era of the 'fifties and 'sixties, whilst the farmer waxed fat and his son was sent to a good school, rode to hounds, and became more or less of a country gentleman, the labourer's son grew up ill-nourished, uneducated, and unenfranchised. His dependence upon the large farmer for his daily bread, the roof over his head, for fuel and for cast-off garments, became almost as marked since his divorce from the soil in the eighteenth century, as his forefather's dependence upon the lords of the manor in the age of feudalism.

The gathering storm which led directly to the great lock-out of 1874 centred around the little village of Exning, in Suffolk. It was a letter signed by seventeen labourers, dated September 26, 1872, served upon the farmers in Exning, which determined the farmers in the eastern counties to form an association for self-protection. This letter was couched in the following terms :—

"SIR,—

"We, the undersigned, do hereby jointly and severally agree to call your attention to the following requirements for our labour—namely, 14s. for a week's work, and no longer to conform with the system of breakfasting before going to work during the winter quarter.

"Hoping you will give this your consideration and meet our moderate requirements amicably,

"Your humble servants——"

This courteous notice, which did not even ask for the demand put forward by the executive of the National Union for a minimum of 16s. for 9½ hours a day, roused the farmers to action. They formed an association at Newmarket on October 15, of which one of the rules enacted "that no member shall make any general alteration in the rate of wages he is at any time paying to his labourers nor any other general alteration in the terms upon which he engages his labourers, without previously giving the committee due notice thereof, and acting in concert with them."

The humble request for 14s. for a week's work came from

labourers at Exning living in cottages many of which had only one bedroom, and a sitting-room 9 feet square, with a ceiling so low that an average sized man could not stand upright. The bedroom had a shelving roof and was dimly lighted by a small window, and in this one room, or rather loft, father and mother and children slept together. The boards of one cottage were so rotten that they swarmed with vermin—"enough to run away with the children," the mother said.[1]

The cottages were destitute of allotments and there was no opportunity to keep pigs. Furthermore there was no school. These wretched men were asking for 14s. a week and the prosperous farmers became alarmed.

There was a striking contrast in these days between the cottages on the Crown lands, which were quite good, and the privately owned cottages.

"Many cottages have but one bedroom," said *The Times* correspondent. "I visited one such cottage in which father, mother, and six children were compelled to herd together—one a grown-up daughter. To be sure, the loft which formed the one bedroom was twice as long as the usual run of such places. The man said he had asked his landlord to put up a partition and make another window, but in vain. In another cottage, the woman said they had put the children upstairs, and she and her husband had slept in a bed on the brick floor until the bottom board of the bed had fallen to pieces from damp, and then they had to go among the children again."

Six weeks later a notice was issued to the Essex farmers. It ran thus :—

"*November* 6, 1872.

"DEAR SIR,—

"The agricultural labourers of this branch of the National Agricultural Union in your employ beg respectfully to inform you that on and after Friday they will require a rise in their wages from 20d. to 26d. per day, and a general conformity to their rules, a copy of which we enclose.

"Being desirous of retaining good relations between employer and employed, and to assure you that no unbecoming feelings prompt us to such a course, we invite you (if our terms are not in accordance with your views) to appoint an early time to meet

[1] *The Agricultural Lock-out*, 1874, by Frederick Clifford.

us, so that we may fairly consider the matter and arrange our affairs amicably.

"Your obedient servants,
"The Committee,
"North Essex Branch."

The phrasing of the letter seems to have been the common one used by the branches of the National Agricultural Union. With the rules enclosed was a preface addressed to the members in which we find Joseph Arch signing his name to the words I have already quoted, "Let courtesy, fairness, and firmness characterise all our demands. Act cautiously and advisedly that no act may have to be repented or repudiated. Do not strike unless all other means fail you. Try all other means."

One cannot stigmatise such letters as these as "firebrand tactics." The farmers of Essex and Suffolk, however, resolved "that the members of the Association shall not in any way acknowledge the Labourers' Union by entering into any contract with such Union, or employ a unionist on strike without the consent of the acting committee."

It will be clear to any impartial person that the farmers at this period of prosperity could easily have paid 16s. for a 54 hours week, the full demands of the National Union. But the labourers in Essex and Suffolk were only asking for 14s. and 15s. a week. Not receiving any reply the men of Exning again wrote to the farmers on March 1, 1873, the following letter:—

"1 *March*, 1873.

"DEAR SIR,—

"The agricultural labourers of this branch of the National Agricultural Union in your employ beg respectfully to inform you that, on and after March 7, they will require a rise in their wages of 3s. a week—a week's work to consist of — hours. Being desirous of retaining good relations between employers and employed, and to assure you that no unbecoming feelings prompt us to such a course, we invite you (if our terms are not in accordance with your views) to appoint an early time to meet us, so that we may fairly consider the matter and arrange our affairs amicably.

"Your obedient servants,
"The Committee,
"Exning Branch."

It will be noticed that the number of hours is left blank. Their wages were still 12s. a week, the same as they were six months previously. They appear to have taken no strike action after their first notice. Apparently they had waited patiently for some softening of the farmer's heart. This circular was put before the committee of the Newmarket Agricultural Association by the employers who had received it. As it bore no signature they made that the excuse for ignoring it. A resolution, however, was passed at a full meeting of the Association to raise wages to 13s. on March 15, 1873. The Exning men accepted this increase and went on working as usual, and in spite of the farmers' repudiation of the Union, attributed the shilling rise to the action of their Union.

But the farmers of the Essex and Suffolk Association on April 17, 1873, at Sudbury, openly declared war upon the Union. They passed the following resolutions :—

"That the members of the Association pledge themselves not to pay more than 2s. a day of twelve hours, including breakfast and dinner for day work. That in the opinion of this meeting the members of the Association should resist the interference of the National Labourers' Union by discharging the men in their employ belonging to the said Union, after giving them a week's notice of withdrawal."

The farmers appealed to the great landowners to help them to stop in its infancy a movement which would "lead to confiscation of property, tearing down all rights except the might of the masses." And they immediately instituted a lock-out which threw a thousand men out of work. The farmers won their first battle against organised agricultural labour. The farmers and their families worked harder than they had ever worked in their lives before, and it was not difficult in those days to get the casual unemployed labour of the towns into the country districts, especially when they were fetched, housed and fed.

The funds of the Union in its infancy were severely strained. Many of the labourers migrated or emigrated and suffered much hardship. It is remarkable that so many who had been kept in such a low state of vitality should

have remained loyal to their Union. Relief pay was only continued for four or five weeks.

After the Essex and Suffolk farmers won their victory they resolved, March 19, 1874, to rescind the resolution passed the year before pledging the members of the Association not to exceed 12s. a week of day work; and it was understood that each member should be "at liberty to pay such wages as were general in the parish in which he occupied any land." The Exning men, however, were adhering to their original demand, and they sent out a notice on February 28, 1874, asking for a shilling rise in their weekly wages. They struck after the usual week's notice, when they found their demand had been ignored or rejected.

Now the Newmarket farmers on March 10 declared war, and resolved to lock out all Union men after giving one week's notice. The men were locked out on March 21, and thus began the great fight between labourers and farmers which resulted in undermining the strength of the Union.

At first it aroused little attention, but soon great personages mingled in the fray. The Bishop of Manchester wrote to *The Times* a letter in which he asked:

"Are the farmers of England going mad? Can they suppose that this suicidal lock-out which has already thrown 4,000 labourers on the funds of the Agricultural Union will stave off for an appreciable time the solution of the inevitable question: What is the equitable wage to pay the men? The most frightful thing that could happen for English society would be a peasants' war. Yet that is what we are driving to if insane counsels of mutual exasperation prevail."

The lock-out extended from the Newmarket district to Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire and it has been estimated that 10,000 labourers were thrown out of work. The two principal unions involved were the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and the Federal Union of Agricultural and General Labourers. In Lincolnshire, where there was a separate union

called the Lincolnshire Labourers' Union, a compromise was arrived at, though it should be remembered that Lincolnshire enjoyed higher wages. The struggle lasted until the end of July when the unfortunate labourers were beaten.

It could not have been carried on as long as eighteen weeks but for public sympathy, and especially the subscriptions from industrial unions, one of which, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, voted £1,000 to the lock-out fund. The cost and extent of the lock-out may be judged from the "authentic" list of grants made to various districts by the Central Executive at Leamington between the months of March and August, 1874.[1]

But not all this money came from outside sources; £5,595 was raised by the Agricultural Unions by special levies, which, considering the low wages the men were receiving, was a very creditable performance.

One interesting feature of the lock-out was the Pilgrims' March of agricultural labourers through the heart of England.

Some hundreds of locked-out labourers met at The Severals, at Newmarket, on June 30, 1874. There they were addressed by Henry Taylor, the General Secretary of the National Labourers' Union, who undertook to lead the men from the eastern counties by easy stages to the large towns

	£	s.	d.
[1] Newmarket (Exning) District	14,984	10	7
Wisbech	1,550	0	0
Bedford	980	0	0
Halstead, Essex	1,460	0	0
Sawston, Cambs.	1,931	0	0
Market Rasen, Lincoln	858	0	0
Luton	162	0	0
Aylesbury	205	0	0
Old Buckenham, Norfolk	585	0	0
Norwich	135	0	0
East Dereham	205	0	0
Wolverton	256	0	0
Banbury	283	0	0
Spalding	59	0	0
Dorset	400	0	0
Market Harborough	164	0	0
Andover	90	0	0
Farringdon	85	0	0
Alton	40	0	0
	£24,432	10	7

[1] *The Agricultural Lock-out*, 1874 by F. Clifford.

in the manufacturing districts to elicit renewed support from the trade unionists and the general public. Though Taylor warned them of the difficulties of a long tramp, quite a number of elderly, worn-looking men volunteered and were chosen to take part in the pilgrimage. Amid great cheering from the men left behind and some weeping from the women, sixty or seventy English peasants in velveteens and smocks with the Union's blue ribbons prominently displayed and with banners flying began their pilgrimage. A light wagon bore the flags when they were not needed for display, and carried what scanty baggage the labourers brought with them.

Cambridge was the first town to receive this quaint pilgrimage. Eye-witnesses have declared that they looked in need of a substantial meal, and this is not to be wondered at, considering the poor food they had been living upon, and that many of them had walked seven or eight miles from their respective villages before they tramped the fifteen miles to Cambridge. After a meal they processed to the Common, where Taylor was again the chief spokesman. Twenty-five pounds were collected, £12 of which consisted of pence and halfpence. After Cambridge they visited Bedford, Nottingham, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Coventry, though it must be admitted that many of these towns were reached by rail. They cleared £700 by this pilgrimage, after paying expenses.

The public received them with great enthusiasm as they marched through the manufacturing towns singing songs written by their friends.

When harvest began in the third week of July in some parts of the eastern counties, it was a bitter pill for the labourers to swallow, to see the corn they had sown reaped and harvested by strangers. A greater use was made of the reaping machines, and the steam plough was brought into play to break up the stubble. By the beginning of August union men began to go back to their jobs on their masters' assumption that they had thrown up their union ticket.

Yet Mr. Clifford tells us that he found in Suffolk no feeling

of yet crushing defeat amongst the men. The farmers had not succeeded in stamping out the union as they had hoped to do. "The weak-kneed among them gave up their tickets, but by far the larger number held on, and including Nationals and Federals, six or even seven thousand union labourers were left in Suffolk when the lock-out was ended." [1]

There is no doubt that the farmers by locking out 10,000 men in 1874 delivered a blow against English agriculture from which it has really never recovered. The land was denuded by migration and emigration of thousands of its most virile workers. Arch returned from Canada in November, 1873, where he had made excellent arrangements for the emigration of thousands of labourers each of whom would have a log hut, with five acres of cleared land and seed for the sowing, from the Canadian Government. Arch admitted himself that English agriculture suffered a decline as a result of his own emigration schemes, and that by emigrating young men he was striking a blow at his own organisation.

The farmers did not play a noble part in this struggle. They tried to make the lock-out universal by carrying the industrial war into Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Norfolk and by getting the County Association of Farmers to declare a general lock-out; but these Associations would not be lured by the blandishments of the Essex, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire farmers. The landowners behaved on the whole better than the clergy, who, as a class, sided with the farmers. Probably their partisanship was due to their social and political timidity, for neither on economic nor on humanitarian grounds had the farmers a sound case. They were making money whilst the labourers were faring badly. There was no indication of an agricultural depression and they were securing the economic advantage of improved machinery and an increased number of fertilisers.

It was the gospel of fear which knit together landlord, farmer, and parson; the fear which was reflected in the mind of Dickens' Sir Leicester Dedlock. The "flood

[1] *The Agricultural Lock-out*, 1874, by F. Clifford.

gates " would be opened if labourers began to combine and demand higher wages. They saw in Arch's mild proposals for allotments, communal appropriation of the land and possibly a repetition of the French Revolution.

It is not surprising that the farmers defeated the labourers. Threatened with eviction from their farm-tied cottages; threatened with the loss of both public and private charities by the class which governed them; voteless, isolated; for the most part unable to read or write, and with the air full of rumours of appropriation of union funds sedulously circulated by their enemies, the miracle would have been if the men had won.

It was continually being dinned into the men's ears by their employers and the clergy that the organisers were living in the lap of luxury on the subscriptions collected in the towns. When one realises that the majority of men could not sign their names, and that money used to arrive at a locked-out village in a bag from which relief was dispensed to men who could only put a cross for their names, the marvel would have been if there had been no discrepancies in cash accounts. Ball said at Newmarket he believed that 90 per cent. of the men were in debt and that 80 per cent. could not write their names.

Though the men did lose their battle, the financial result of the struggle was that the labourers in all the eastern and southern and midland counties came through the fiery ordeal with a higher weekly wage to take every Saturday night. That is to say, the low level of 12s. had been raised to 13s. or 14s., and in Norfolk to 15s., as far as the eastern counties were concerned, and in all the other counties a rise was perceptible in 1874-5.

Mr. Thomas F. Plowman, a farmers' advocate, writes in his *Fifty Years of a Showman's Life:*

" Although wages had from 1850 onwards gradually advanced, it must be admitted that they had not kept pace with the rising prices, and herein must be found some justification for the effort made to redress the balance. But there was less justification for the methods employed to this end. No distinction was drawn between the good and the bad master, and the most violent and incendiary language was used of all alike. . . . The

labourers, headed by self-constituted leaders, walked about in procession through the country towns, wearing the blue ribbon which was the badge of the Union, and was to the farmer as the red rag to the bull, and singing about the land, honestly believing that they were coming into possession of it.

"I remember my main difficulty with the farmers was in persuading them that the most politic course was to allow the other side to have a monopoly of the strong language; they did so want to pour out their souls in response. . . . The Union struck at the old relationship, in which there was give and take on both sides, between masters and men, and a great deal of bad feeling was engendered. The fuller effects of this were manifest when, a little later on, the great depression in agriculture set in, and both sides felt the pinch of bad times."

The labourers felt that on their side was all the giving, and on the farmers' all the taking.

As a method of undermining loyalty to the Union, farmers in the Bury St. Edmunds district began to raise the wages of all non-unionists from 13s. to 14s.

In certain districts there was a cry amongst the labourers for "a stone of flour a day," or its equivalent, that is 2s. 6d. or 2s. 9d., but this does not seem to have been an official union demand. "To base wages upon a sliding scale, rising and falling according to the current price of corn, is old-fashioned nonsense," said a Sussex farmer. And he was right. I mention this because I find the proposition that wages should be paid according to the current price of corn constantly cropping up in after years, especially in the eastern counties.

The opposition of the farmers was not based on any economic reasons. Their opposition was to the labourers' right to combine, or, as the farmers chose to put it, to "being dictated to by foreigners," that is to say by an executive sitting at Leamington, Lincoln, or London. This was distinctly shown by the replies to Mr. S. Morley, M.P., and Mr. Dixon, M.P., who tried to bring about a conciliation.

The Duke of Rutland, who owned between 9,000 and 10,000 acres in the parishes of Wood-Ditton and Chevley, wrote a circular letter to the labourers on the estate with a view to conciliating them. He addressed them as "My Friends," but his letter contained the following statement:

" It is true that when I heard that my tenants had decided to lock-out the Union men I thought it right to support them ; and I did so, as I thought this was the best course, not in the interest of my tenants only, but in that of the labourers also." It is not surprising that the labourers were unconvinced, but felt that even the best of the land-owners had joined in a conspiracy with the farmers and the clergy against their right to combine.

One interesting feature of the lock-out was that many non-union men and village tradesmen subscribed to the Union lock-out fund.

The lock-out pay seems to have been 1s. 6d. a day for the members of the National Union, and for the members of the Lincolnshire Labourers' Union in Suffolk 10s. a week, with 1s. extra for a man with a wife and something extra for children.

Mr. Ball, who had been an agricultural labourer and a local Methodist preacher, made some pointed remarks at the Severals, on the Duke of Rutland's letter.

" According to the Duke of Rutland's letter," said Mr. Ball, " the labourers were raised to a better position through the kindness and humanity of employers. You might as well expect the labourers to understand Egyptian hieroglyphics as to understand this. What was expected from men in the village was a deal of bowing and scraping. If they took off their hats to the village clergyman he would perhaps reward them by saying ' How do you do.' It was funny of one paid servant to expect this homage from another. He did not, however, want to teach respect to others, but respect to themselves."

Some farmers were heard to express their admiration of the true British stubbornness and pluck shown by the men and their wives, in adhering to, under conditions of semi-starvation, and persistent persecution, their " sacred right " to combine.

There were one or two instances illustrating the curious personal relationship between master and man, and of good humour prevailing, even when unionists and farmers met together. For instance, at a meeting of the Hoxne Branch of the National Union, which was preceded by a dinner, a farmer presided and helped to carve the joints, and Sir

Edward Kerrison, a landowner, delivered a speech. After the speech one of the delegates proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Sir Edward and Lady Caroline Kerrison, which was carried with acclamation.

During the lock-out poaching increased and many a gamekeeper paid 6d. for a pheasant's egg without inquiring where it was obtained, even though he had a shrewd suspicion that it came from his employer's estate. Violence, though, was seldom resorted to in conflicts with keepers. Instead of beating or shooting keepers they feed a lawyer by subscription, and paid the fines imposed by the same co-operative method.[1]

Among the landowners hostile to the Union was the Marquis of Bristol, who was very angry at Arch's statement that the aristocracy had stolen 7,000,000 of acres from the people within a certain period. "These enclosures," said the Marquis, with righteous indignation, "had been based upon Acts of Parliament. The title to such land was as sacred as though it had been bought in the market."

Although the Norfolk farmers did not show the same hostility as the Suffolk farmers, and were paying a cash wage of 15s. instead of the 13s. of Suffolk, they formed an association on June 20, 1874, at Norwich, "to defend the interests of the occupiers of the soil against the oppression of the Agricultural Labourers' Union." About 500 farmers were present, with Lord Walsingham in the chair. Lord Walsingham fortunately advised the farmers not to talk about stamping out the Union or instituting a lock-out.

"Now, as reasonable men," he said, "the farmers could not deny this right of combination; and if a proper tone on this point had in the first instance been taken by the farmers in the eastern counties it was not improbable that all disagreement might have been prevented."

There is no doubt that the newly introduced mowing machine at haysel—the feeding off by stock in many a meadow intended for hay, broke the back of the Union at

[1] *The Great Lock-out*, 1874.

haymaking, time as the reaper and the elevator now being bought in larger numbers by the farmers, broke it at harvest time.

I have questioned a number of men who can remember these early years of Arch's Union, and their replies throw much light upon the difficulties which beset any kind of labour organisation in those days. Mr. James Reynolds, J.P., of Lambourn, Berks, writes :—

"In 1874, when I was seventeen, I did some booking for a branch of the N.A.L.U. at Wherwell, Hants. J. Arch, R. Ball and others visited the villages and the men responded readily to their call, and joined the Union. But they were met with opposition from every quarter. The Squire, the land agent, the farmer, and often the parson, showed hostility from the first. A great difficulty presented itself in obtaining rooms to meet in, as all schools were in the hands of the Church. So meetings were chiefly held and the contributions paid in little Methodist chapels. It was not possible to maintain oversight and remedy grievances which soon cropped up between master and man, and the clerical staff of the N.A.L.U. became quite unable to cope with the work. Men's wages then were 10s. per week ; women's 8d. or 9d. per day. I worked on two farms when a big lad for 3s. and 3s. 6d. per week. Mowing machines and self-binders had not then appeared, and on farms where now three men and a boy are employed, there would be seven or eight men and two or three boys. I have watched the depopulation of villages and the migration of all who wanted to make headway for the last forty years."

A Dorset labourer from the village of Beaminster, writing of this time, tells me that his grandfather, who had to live on 7s. a week with his wife and five children, could neither read nor write :—

"But I've heard father say he would get a newspaper and go to the village pub and pretend to be reading, but was actually reciting all sorts of nonsense from his own head, and some one would say : 'You've got the up end down,' when he would make answer : 'A good scholar can read anyhow.'

"My father could not remember his mother. She died when he was young, being the youngest of the five. He remembers waking up one morning and finding his dad dead by his side when he was eight years of age. Then he had to start work as dairy boy or go into the workhouse, and he worked from daylight to dark, and after that he married at the age of eighteen, when he

became a carter at 10s. a week. There were nine of us to live on that besides father and mother. Poor dad had to tramp four miles every day to work, seven days a week, besides being on the tramp all day with the horses, without half enough to eat and sometimes wet through before he got to work. They must have been made of cast-iron in those days. He did this for fourteen years and reared us all up, and only once in those fourteen years did he ask for parish relief when he was home with a quinsey for a fortnight. He got a little allowed to him from the parish, but after he started work again the Chairman of the Board of Guardians, who was a gentleman, rode to hounds, etc., rode up to the farm and asked if dad could not pay back the money at so much a week because his wages had risen to 11s. a week at that time, with not one of us earning a penny. When the farmer heard what he had come for, he followed him off the farm cursing him all the time, asking him if that was what he paid Poor Rates for, for him to keep hunters to ride about. . . . I've had some of It. It makes my blood boil as I write this."

Mr. Pink, of Boro Green, Kent, tells me that he remembers the Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union, which according to Simmons' evidence before the Royal Commission of 1881 had a membership of 14,000.[1] He states that when the Union was started the wages in Sussex and Kent were 10s. to 12s., which low wages the Union raised to 15s. The Union had the advantage of a paper called *The Kent Messenger*, which Simmons edited. The farmers in the Isle of Sheppy answered the Union demand with a lock-out. Mr. Pink writes :—

"I told the farmers at a meeting we had with them that if they did not pay the 15s. I was instructed to take away one hundred of their best men on Monday morning. The farmers shouted 'Rot!' and 'Go to hell with your humbug.' I told them I would take single tickets but not to that isolated place they spoke of, but to respectable and different railways, where the men would earn 18s. to 20s. per week, and I would soon remove their furniture so that the farmers could have the empty houses, and that this would not be an empty boast.

"On Monday morning I took tickets for 105 for the places where the men were wanted, and their furniture soon followed, and many a family have often thanked me for the move I gave them.

[1] He needlessly apologises for what he calls his "scribble and bad spelling; for I am self-taught on the Downs whilst scaring crows and minding sheep."

"When I was nine years old I started work on the Wrotham Downs scaring crows and minding sheep for the noble sum of threepence per day. Those were hard times. Simmons' Union, as it was known by, done a lot of good, and it would have done more had Simmons not had so many irons in the fire, and had not slipped off in the dark, and never was seen in the county again."

Mr. Pink writes of the large exodus from Kent by emigration to the Colonies in those days, which, while it helped the Union for the time being by making labour more scarce and relieving the funds of the Union of lock-out pay, drained the countryside of its best young blood, which ultimately was not only bad for England nationally, but also destroyed the vitality of the Union.

I was interested to compare Mr. Pink's letter, which I received in November, 1919, with some evidence given by Simmons before the Royal Commission in 1881, which shows that farmers at that time did not stand on ceremony in giving labourers notice of a lock-out.

Simmons stated that his Union never originated a strike; that, he contended, was the great difference between his union and Arch's.

"May I ask what was the cause of the lock-out in Kent?" asked one Commissioner.

"You will in the first place remember," answered Simmons, "that it was at the close of the harvest season of 1878, when agriculture was becoming somewhat depressed, and there were a number of meetings held by farmers and they decided by resolution to reduce the wages, and many farmers carrying out that resolution adopted a very arbitrary course. They simply gave their labourers notice on Saturday that next Monday they would start lower wages, and the Union required in all cases where men were weekly servants the full week's notice of reduction, and some farmers complied, and others declined and said: 'No, next Monday you start at 3d. or 4d. a day less than you have had.' A considerable number of labourers refused to do that, and the farmers told them 'Then you can go from the farms.'" [1]

The spirit of the women during the lock-out was exemplified by the statement overheard as a farmer drove by down

[1] *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 1880–1882.

the village street, " the labourers would ride in the gigs and the farmers in the tumbrils," a prophecy which has not yet been realised! There is no doubt that union speakers generated many an illusion. There was a pathetic hope amongst these locked-out labourers that an Act of Old Age Pensions would soon be passed and that the land would shortly be theirs. They had to wait thirty-four years before they were given an old age pension, or the opportunity to enter upon a statutory Small Holding.

PART FOUR

THE AFTERMATH OF THISTLES

THE 'EIGHTIES.

All those who gained their living from the land will remember 1879 as the "Black Year." To the pessimistic it came as an evil omen of the era of agricultural depression which was to follow. It was the worst of a succession of wet seasons, and the winter of 1880–1 was one of the severest ever known. The land, saturated and chilled, produced coarse herbage, since the finer grasses languished and were destroyed. Fodder and grain were imperfectly matured, mould and ergot were prevalent amongst plants, and fluke produced liver-rot amongst live-stock. In 1879 3,000,000 sheep died or were sacrificed from rot in England and Wales.[1] By 1881 5,000,000 sheep had perished, at an estimated loss of £10,000,000.

Besides this great calamity this year was distinguished by one of the worst harvests of the century; by outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and of pleuro-pneumonia.[2]

The steam whistle of factory and train sounded the death-knell to many a village industry. In many a parish the village tailor crossed his legs for the last time. The smithy stood black and silent, and children no longer loitered by the anvil from which no music was hammered. Windmills beat their arms in vain on hill or plain. No grist was brought to their moveless stones. No dusty miller lingered by the mill-pond, which poured its wealth of shining liquid power past an unresponsive wheel. The click of hand-looms worked by village maidens was no longer heard at

[1] *R.A.S.E. Journal*, 1881.
[2] *A Short History of English Agriculture*, by W. H. R. Curtler.

open cottage windows. The village shoemaker who made boots which could stand the rough wear of the furrows ceased to be a creative artist. He became a cobbler. The rhythmic swing of the sower's arm was a rarer sight than the drill, and the silken song of the scythe was drowned in the rattle of the mowing machine with its ugly chattering teeth. "Cheeseloft" became a legend over the door of many a farm building, for the dairymaid disappeared as the old stone cheese-press that she raised and lowered so often became her tombstone.

Public sympathy, at any rate as expressed by those who governed, began to swing round to the farmer. Landlords had steadily increased their rents during the 'fifties, 'sixties, and 'seventies, and farmers had undoubtedly felt the pressure of the growing strength of the trade unions. Not that they could not afford to pay the wages demanded, but through their stubborn opposition to the labourers' demands by lock-outs, and by letting down the fertility of their land, there must have been a considerable amount of economic waste. A Royal Commission on Agriculture was set up, under the chairmanship of the Duke of Richmond. From this Commission, of the three classes who lived by the land—the farmer, the landlord, and the labourer—it was the farming class which perhaps received the most attention. At any rate, it was immediately followed by rebates on rents, the Ground Game Act, and later by an Agricultural Holdings Act. The labourer was still voteless and there was little sympathy for a class wallowing in the luxury of a cash wage of 13s. or 14s. a week whilst rent rolls were declining and farming profits in many instances vanishing. Royal Commissions in these days considered representation of labour as an act of supererogation.

On the labourer's side improvements in Allotments and Housing Acts followed their course with painfully slow Parliamentary procedure. Industrial organisation amongst the agricultural labourers steadily went downhill from this time, for the "Black Year," not only produced the worst harvest ever known, and was ill-famed for the destruc-

tion of livestock by disease, but it also marked the turn of the tide from comparatively high prices for corn to a period of declining prices which steadily ebbed with slight fluctuations during twenty years.

The agricultural unions, in the face of the falling prices and bad harvests, had not the courage to ask for higher wages or shorter hours. On the other hand, they submitted to a reduction in wages, which, however, it should be remembered, never fell to the level of the "golden era" of the 'fifties and 'sixties.

The National Union fell rapidly into decline. It could not stand up against the economic pressure from without, and the fierce dissensions from within. Disunion started in 1875, following the defeat in Suffolk and the surrounding counties. Members, disheartened by the failure to win higher wages, now sought to gain a footing on the land.

Mr. Matthew Vincent threw himself into this new movement in 1875, by giving it the support of his paper.[1] In Arch's absence in Surrey, the executive of the "National" went so far as to pass resolutions to purchase a farm. They extricated themselves from this doubtful legal proceeding with some difficulty. Many members fell away from the Union to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of a Co-operative Land Company which, though it did materialise in solid acres, vanished almost as quickly as a dream.

The Union split up into "Federals," or self-governing county areas, which managed entirely their own affairs, controlling their own funds. But the death-blow inflicted upon the Union came from the unsound sick benefit societies which the Union in its folly took under its wing. Any old man who was a member of some unsound village sick benefit society was admitted on an entrance fee of 1s. 6d., and naturally the younger men, seeing financial ruin facing the Union, severed their connection with it.

Arch, in spite of his qualities as an agitator, was by no means the right man to settle differences. He was too

[1] The attack made upon Vincent by Taylor for appropriating the profits on his paper was unwarrantable. Vincent was an idealist, and he made the mistake of imagining Eldorado can be provided by private subscription. Eventually he left England for Australia, a broken journalist.

autocratic, and not the man to pour oil upon troubled waters. From a membership of over 80,000 in 1874 the National Union sank to a membership of 15,000 in 1881, and to 4,254 in 1889. Suspicion was rife as to the mal-administration of funds; and disheartened by the calumnies heaped upon his name it was not unnatural that Joseph Arch should seek consolation in the ranks of a political party which welcomed him and used him to the utmost. Amongst those who paraded Joseph Arch in the early 'eighties was the late Joseph Chamberlain, and Gladstone found the labourers' champion an asset to his party in passing the Franchise Act of 1884, which at last granted the agricultural labourer the right to vote. Henceforth the labourer became the shuttlecock of the contending battledores of Liberal and Conservative politicians in all rural districts.

It is amazing when we realise the illiteracy of the farm worker at that date, that the Union achieved any success at all as an organisation. So rapid was the enrolment of members in its first two years that they soon outpaced the staffing capacities of the Union. The knowledge of how difficult it was forty years after to get farm workers with sufficient education or courage to act as branch secretaries makes one wonder how the Union managed to induce men to act as secretaries only two years after the Education Act of 1870.

It should be remembered that at this time the prevalent feeling towards education in rural districts was still very much like that expressed by Doyle in 1843, when he said: "The word education must in most cases be taken to mean really little more than a certain amount of physical deterioration, incurred by wasting time in crowded and unwholesome rooms."[1]

A child above the age of ten who had reached the Fourth Standard prescribed by the code of 1876, could be freed by a certificate from the Government inspector from further attendance. Moreover, children who could satisfy

[1] *Report of the Special Assistant Commissioners to the Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture of* 1843, Vol. XII.

the local authorities that they were properly employed in labour and who held certificates intimating that they had reached the Third Standard had only to put in 150 annual attendances from the age of ten to that of thirteen. Reliable authorities have asserted that wherever these by-laws were in force 99 per cent. of the boys could free themselves from school attendance at the age of eleven. [1]

In Scotland it was otherwise. Evidence was forthcoming even as far back as the Commission of 1870 that the boys and girls of Scottish hinds were kept at school until they were twelve or thirteen years of age.

Labourers, no doubt, felt the lack of the earnings of their children, and it is to their credit that they, much more than their employers, were the educational enthusiasts. It would be sentimental to say that the labourer loved education for education's sake. Probably, the sentiment of the ordinary parent was expressed by a woman to a Commissioner in 1867 when she said: "If I could only get him to be a scholar he should never be a farm labourer."

In Sussex in the early 'eighties shepherds, as a rule, could neither read nor write, and yet they had their own way of counting sheep. The strange formula ran thus: One-erum, Two-erum, Cock-erum, Shoo-erum, Shitherum, Shatherum, Wineberry, Wagtail, Tarrididdle, Ten.

Much of the evidence given by Joseph Arch before the Royal Commission in 1881 is interesting, not only from the light it throws upon the labourer's position at that time, but also on the character of Arch himself. He told the Commission that wages in 1871 were almost at starvation point.

"What do you consider," asked the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, the President, "to be what you call starvation point? I do not quite understand how you gauge that." [2]

"When a man's wages for the whole of the week do not leave him more than a penny per meal per head, men, women and children, I think that is next to starvation."

When asked what he considered a labourer ought to be

[1] *Annals of the British Peasantry*, by Russell M. Garnier.
[2] *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 1880–82.

paid, he again and again stoutly refused to be drawn. "I am not here to express an opinion upon that," he answered; "as a labourer I should myself want to get the best wages I could."

Again he was questioned; again he answered: "No, I am not come here to say what he ought to get. I am not come here to draw the line of the labourers' wages."

He complained of the farmers foolishly starving the land of labour; he said that 700,000 souls amongst the agricultural labouring classes had been emigrated since 1872; and that from 1872 to 1875 wages had increased in most counties 2s. and 3s. a week, and in some counties, 4s. Since 1877 wages had been lowered 1s., and in some counties 2s. and even 3s. He gave the Warwickshire wages in 1872 as averaging 10s. to 11s. per week, the Dorsetshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Hants wages as 7s. to 8s., and the Somersetshire wages as 6s. to 7s. exclusive of all hay and harvest money. He spoke of the high rents that labourers had to pay for their allotments, and considered that every cottage should have a quarter of an acre attached to it.

When he was recalled, he gave evidence that the weekly subscription for trade purposes was 2¼d. per week. Questioned again as to the minimum wage of a labourer, he answered: "I should think they ought to have as much money to support them outside the union workhouse as it costs them inside. I say that a man who has a wife and family to maintain and has to pay rent and all other expenses upon a home deserves as much per head for each of his family as it costs us to keep them as paupers in the workhouse. . . . For a man and wife and six children costs in a workhouse the amount of 30s. a week."

He took care, however, to qualify this statement by saying that he did not advocate an employer paying a man with a large family £2, or a man with none at all 10s. a week. He contended for what he called "cottage right" by the same legislative means as farmers demanded tenant right.

"The tied cottage," he said, "binds a man hand and foot. If I rented a cottage from his Grace, and I paid him £4 or £5 a year rent for that cottage, I ought to have the fullest liberty to

take my labour to the best market ; but when a cottage is let with the farm, the man is compelled to labour on that farm from January to December ; he is not allowed to remove anywhere else, however good the wages may be in the neighbourhood. I know a case which occurred in 1872, seven miles from my house, in which when the East and West Junction Railways passed through the district the railway companies were offering 3s. 6d. and 3s. 10d. per day ; and the young men who were at work on the land for 11s. per week left it, and they were told that unless they came back for 12s. per week they should leave their cottages."

"In the case which you mention," said his questioner, "a cottager is not obliged to go and take that particular cottage under the farmer."

"No," answered Arch, "but then you must remember that taking our rural population these last twenty years a very large number of cottages have gone to decay. I know villages where seven and eight and ten cottages in my remembrance have gone to decay. The inhabitants of those cottages have been driven to the towns. Those who remained behind, of course, were glad to take them for the sake of shelter. If a man is forced into these things, it is almost superfluous to ask him why he does them. In my own village within the last seven weeks there have been six cottages pulled down. Where are those people to go ? There are two or three cottages built on a farm, and a man is told : 'You can go and live in one of those if you like.' The necessity of the case drives him to go and live in one of those cottages."

Mr. George Edwards remembers a farm labourer at Narburgh, in Norfolk, being dismissed and evicted from his cottage for taking an active part in the Union. The man's goods and chattels were thrown out on to the roadside, and there they remained for over a week, for either no cottage was available in that neighbourhood or no one dared to house the furniture.[1]

But this was not all the persecution he had to endure. With a Gilbertian travesty of justice the man was prosecuted and fined for obstructing the King's highway !

Some years later a Sussex ploughman at whose cottage

[1] Mr. George Edwards states that landlords in collusion with farmers during the 'seventies "tied" many cottages which were "free" in order to sap the independence of the men ; but Mr. Ankers Simmons, than whom there is no land agent of greater experience in England, assures me that cottages were let with farms as frequently before Arch's time as afterwards. It is probable the custom of letting cottages with farms was increased during the depression.

I was sleeping, informed me that he knew a man who was dismissed and evicted for having the audacity to ask for 1s. a week more wages. His furniture was thrown out on the roadside, and there it remained in all weathers for a fortnight; and but for the kindly help of a neighbour, who lent him a wagon cloth, the furniture would have been badly damaged. It was many weeks before he could find fresh employment, and then like an honest beggar driven to desperation he was forced to take even lower wages.

Arch had experience in his trade union work of the difficulty of organising a "close" village, in contradistinction to an "open" one. A close village was one in which all the cottages were practically owned by one man; though it is only fair to add that if these belonged to a landlord like the Duke of Bedford, or Lord Tollemache, or Earl Spencer, the cottages were generally very much better than those in open villages, where cottages were owned by avaricious small men.

He gave evidence, though, of the Duke of Bedford prohibiting his cottagers keeping a pig, or a dog, or fowls.

"Do any of you attach any importance," he was asked, "to the argument which is used against labourers keeping pigs on account of its giving them encouragement in pilfering?"

"The labourer is as honest as any other class," flashed out Arch.

"I am not saying that it is not so," answered Lord Vernon, "but do you attach any importance to that argument?"

"Not at all; it is an indefensible slur upon the honesty of my class," replied the sturdy champion of the labourer.

When asked whether landlords, as a body, had opposed the labourers, he answered: "Taking the majority, they have bitterly opposed us." Then he admitted that Sir Edward Kerrison had not, and that the Duke of Grafton had remained neutral, but that Lord and Lady Stradbroke were "formidable enemies."

When he stated that the labourers, even with a slight decline in wages were paid two or three shillings more than they were paid before 1872, he was asked if labourers had not suffered less than the landlords and tenants since the depression set in.

"No," answered Arch.

"Are not the labourers at the present moment better clothed, and better fed, and better housed than they ever have been?"

Arch's reply was: "Yes, that may be. But at the same time, when you say that the landlords and the farmers have suffered more than the labourers, it is a moral certainty that with 10s. or 12s., or even 14s., a man who has a wife and three or four children cannot keep so good a home nor feed his family as well as the farmer and the landlord can his."

"That is a different proposition altogether," said Mr. Hunter Rodwell, the Commissioner. "Putting the thing relatively, and supposing that of the three men one has had £5,000 a year to spend, and another £500 a year, and another £50 a year, the man who has £50 a year to spend has lost less in proportion than either of the other two classes, has he not?"

"Yes," answered Arch, "if you talk about the losses in proportion to the income, of course the landlords have lost more than the labourers, and so have the farmers in the aggregate; but if you come to the question of the suffering arising from the losses, the labourers have suffered far more than the farmers and landlords have. Take £1,000 a year, if you please, from his Grace, and take 2s. a week off my wages, and I suffer far more than his Grace would by the loss of £1,000 a year. Then if the farmer's profits be £200 a year, and let him lose £150 and only clear £50, and take 2s. a week off my wages, and I suffer greater loss than he does." [1]

Perhaps Mr. A. Simmons, the secretary of the Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union, made a better answer when the same question was put to him:—

"I should say," said Mr. Simmons, "that the landlord suffers least. I should say that the farmer suffers most, but that he feels his suffering less than the labourer. To the labourer it is a question really of less food; to the farmer it is not absolutely a question of bread; it is comforts or no comforts." [2]

Though the labourer was able to buy many things cheaper than he was ten years before, it should be borne in mind that beef, butter, and potatoes showed a distinct rise in prices, whilst wheat and cheese remained the same as during the previous decade. Towards the end of this decade, for the first time in their lives, thousands of labourers who had hardly ever tasted any other meat than that obtained from the pig which they kept in their sties, or the rabbit which

[1] *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 1880–82.
[2] *Ibid.*

they snared in the field, began to taste mutton and beef sent frozen to England from the ends of the world.

It is an ironical reflection on civilisation that the English labourer who fed the bullock in the yard which he overlooked from his cottage ; and folded the sheep on the roots under his eye, had to wait until frozen meat came to him from the Antipodes or the ranches of America before butcher's meat became part of his diet, even once a week. This is no exaggeration, for men to-day have told me that the frozen meat which arrived in this country in the late 'eighties was the first time they had tasted mutton in their lives.

In spite of the reductions in wages, made in many areas, especially in the southern counties, the labourer received higher cash wages at this period than he did before the birth of Arch's Union. Yet he suffered more than either of the other two classes who experienced greater financial losses, for the reduction of a shilling or two in wages, when these are not at a figure sufficient to maintain physical efficiency, means suffering in a very real sense.

More and more it became the custom for farmers to reduce the labourers' perquisites and to be more ruthless in turning men off on wet days. The official figures then must be used with some caution.[1]

	s.	d.		s.	d.
[1] Surrey	15	0	Worcester	13	6
Kent	16	6	Warwick	14	0
Sussex	13	6	Leicester (ordinarily)	11	6
Southampton	12	0	„ (near the iron mines)	14	6
Berks	12	0	Rutland	—	
Bucks	14	0	Lincoln	14	3
Hertford	13	6	Middlesex	15	6
Oxon	13	3	Nottingham (ordinarily)	14	0
Northampton	—		„ (near the mines)	19	0
Huntingdon	12	0	Derby	16	6
Bedford	12	6	Chester	—	
Cambridge	12	6	Lancashire	17	6
Essex	12	6	Yorkshire, E.	15	0
Suffolk	12	6	„ W.	16	6
Norfolk	12	6	„ N.	16	6
Wilts	12	0	Durham	17	9
Dorset	11	0	Northumberland	16	6
Devon	13	0	Cumberland	18	0
Cornwall	14	6	Westmoreland	18	0
Somerset	13	0	Monmouth	12	0
Gloucester	13	6	Wales	—	
Hereford	13	0			
Salop	13	0			
Stafford	13	6	Average	14	1¾

—From Dr. Hasbach's and the Assistant Commissioner's figures.

Farmers knew, too, that the threat of a labour-saving machine could still strike fear to the heart of the labourer. "The farmers have used machinery as a sort of weapon over the backs of the labourers," said Joseph Arch before the Royal Commission. "I heard of a certain farmer who boasted for years at a market ordinary that he bought a reaping machine, but he never used it, and he said that it paid him a good percentage, keeping it in the coachhouse to frighten the labourers with."

The pinch of poverty was increased, too, by the falling off in family earnings. It was chiefly through the action of the trade unions that the degrading gang system of employing married women, young girls and boys on field work under a ganger who exploited their labour and had no regard for their morals, had largely disappeared. The Education Act of 1870 had also cut inroads into the earning capacities of families. Married women were seen less in the fields, and the new schools absorbed the children. It was common practice however for boys to work in gangs, and they did not appear to have a very happy life of it. A man who was a member of Arch's Union, and is now living at Maylands, Essex, tells me of the experience he had when he was nine years of age at Chelmondiston on the Orwell, which fortunately had its humorous side. Working one day with nine other boys under the charge of a foreman aged sixteen, at singling mangolds, this juvenile gang was made aware of the farmer watching them at work from behind a hedge by hearing him roar out to the ganger :

"Get me two ash sticks about a yard long. I shall be back in a minute."

The bigger boys at once held a council of war and decided to put up a fight. But the farmer brought along with him heavy artillery in the form of a large retriever dog. Surrender to the inevitable was imminent, but not until the biggest boy had got a piece of the root of a tree placed inside the seat of his trousers. He was the first boy to receive the thrashing, and whilst the ash stick descended upon the root the others burst out laughing. The laughter incensed the farmer so much that he thrashed every one of the boys in turn

"Some years after this occurred," remarked my informant caustically, "I met this same farmer in a lonely spot. I laid hold of him and invited him to have another go at me, but he declined with thanks."

Simmons contended that cash wages in Kent had dropped from 15s. to 12s. during the last five years, and he gave some interesting figures as to the losses from wet and frosty weather. Six labourers kept an account of the days lost in twelve months. These showed an average loss of eighty-five days in wet and wintry weather. Had it not been for emigration agents, and the lowering in the price of many commodities purchased in the shops, the shrinkage in family earnings would probably have brought about serious trouble in rural districts. The custom of baking bread in their own ovens was being dropped in labourers' families, because ovens were not provided in the newer type of cottage and the older ones were falling into decay. Increased machinery had shortened the harvest earnings. Simmons made the statement that the Kentish labourer spent on the average only 6d. a week on beer, "and his Grace is aware," he added, "that the labouring people in many places look upon beer as food."[1]

[1] We get a glimpse at an agricultural labourer's budget with an average family in 1880 from the *Parliamentary Report Commissions*, 1881, XVI. 310.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
Wages	15	0	Rent	1	7½
Garden	1	6	Bread	6	0
Extras	1	0	Bacon	2	6
			Tea and Sugar	1	3
	17	6	Cheese	1	6
			Butter	1	6
			Fuel	1	3
			Candles and soap	0	6
			Clothes	1	6
			Schooling	0	3
			Sundries	0	6
				18	4½

It will be noticed that there is no allowance made for church or chapel collection, a newspaper, a postage stamp, a journey in a carrier's cart, or a railway, a glass of beer, or even a doctor's fees.

Presumably the deficit between the revenue and the expenditure had to be met by the cold hand of charity, for I imagine the extras included harvest money.

An official attempt has been made to prove that the poverty was not so great at this time by giving the figures of the reduction of outdoor paupers, but this is counterbalanced by the increase of the number of indoor paupers occasioned by the rigour of the new Poor Law.[1] Altogether the general report on Labour issued by the Commission must be discounted by the extraordinary omission of the evidence of the labourers' representatives.

In trying to compose a picture of the labourer's life in the early 'eighties we must remember that he was still outside the pale of citizenship, and that nearly everything that the English peasant held dear, such as the opportunity of staking out a cow, of being able to keep a pony or donkey or fowls on a bit of common land, of cutting furze to heat the bread oven, or fern as bedding for pigs, or cutting turves for firing had been taken from him by successive Enclosure Acts, and that instead of being able to produce much of his food or acquire fuel close to his cottage door he had to buy nearly everything, and more and more he was being reduced to the position of the seller who has only one article to sell—his labour, and the price of this he knew was being driven down.

Arch had long harped on the need of three or four acres for every cottager. He said he could get a living from five acres, and we can trace in Arch's statement the genesis of the agitation which was afterwards known as the "Three Acres and a Cow," cry of Mr. Jesse Collings. There were the Charity Lands left expressly for the poor which had been mal-administered. These Charity Lands were the crumbs left to the labourer after the landowners had fed themselves to repletion under successive Enclosures Acts. But even these Charity Lands were not being used by the labourers. Allotments, it is true, had been in existence for some time; but that was largely through the enterprise of a private society known as the Labourer's Friend Society founded in 1834, for the old Act of 1819 had become a dead letter. Charity Commissioners were unsympathetic, if not hostile to labourers using charity land; and the country clergy even, when they wished to let their Glebe land were often prevented

[1] Vide Dr. Hasbach p. 293.

from doing so, though Canon Tuckwell in a famous controversial battle fought down the opposition of his Bishop successfully.

In spite of the Bishop's inhibitions he did cut up his glebe farm of about 200 acres into allotments, and after two years he could write: "Already throughout the village I found corn bags ranged along the walls, potatoes under the beds, hams hanging from the ceilings wrapped up in old Reynolds' weekly newspapers; the housewives for the first time in their lives facing winter unemploy without alarm.[1]

Canon Tuckwell however by no means regarded allotments as a solution of the problem of rural poverty. Far from it; for he became a convinced land nationaliser. A farm at Assington, near Sudbury, Suffolk, was sold to some labourers by the Liberal member for Mid Norfolk. It had a struggle during the depression, but has managed to survive to this day (1920) and I am informed by a member of it that a share sold in 1899 changed hands in 1910 for £130.

The discovery that the Act of William IV. applied to all charity lands lies to the credit of Mr. J. Theodore Dodd, the son of an Oxfordshire clergyman. An agitation arose in the House of Commons, powerfully backed by Mr. Jesse Collins and Sir Charles Dilke, to bring in an Allotment Act in 1882, which instituted the principle of compulsion, and made the County Court and not the Charity Commission the final arbiter. Mr. Howard Evans, who devoted a tremendous amount of energy in getting up facts, was the real author of the Act. This was successfully passed through the Lower House in 1882, but unfortunately, the House of Lords destroyed the validity of it by making the Charity Commissioners the supreme judges as to whether land should or should not be let. The land which could be used as allotments under this Extension of the Allotments Act, 1882, was by no means inconsiderable, and it was calculated that excluding land allocated to Church, or educational purposes, the value for purely allotment purposes would be £1,000,000.[2]

Amongst labourers there was a strong feeling of injustice

[1] *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, by the Rev. W. Tuckwell.
[2] Report on Charitable Trusts Acts, 1884.

over the rents charged, which were often anything from 25 per cent. to 500 per cent. above the rents charged to farmers.

Vexatious rules were often imposed which made the granting of an allotment dependent upon the labourer's good behaviour in attending church, or on condition that it should not be worked on Sunday mornings, not even before breakfast. It is not surprising that under such conditions allotments in one county—Kent—had fallen from 2360 in number to 300 in 1881.

John Stuart Mill welcomed the rise of the Agricultural Labourers' Union as a political force as well as an industrial one. Though he died in 1873 he saw in it a lever for obtaining the franchise, better houses, and better education. He also appeared to be in favour of the peasant proprietorship aims of its leaders, though he seemed to regard allotments academically as a "contrivance to compensate the labourer for the insufficiency of his wages."

The fact that allotments had been more popular in low paying counties like Oxfordshire and Norfolk, lends an argument in support of Mill. On the other hand, we find that, as wages rose, allotments became more popular in these counties, and in the north where wages were much higher the men who boarded with the farmer naturally showed little desire to cultivate allotments, and the married men who lived in their own cottage had little spare time, for their customary hours were much longer in the summer than those of the southern labourer. Though better fed than the southern labourer, in some respects the young unmarried stockman's life was hardly distinguishable from domestic servitude, being at the beck and call of the farmer or the farmer's wife at all hours. Then in a county like Cumberland men had far better opportunities of acquiring a small farm in that county of small holdings than in the south.[1]

Much evidence was brought forward that labourers in certain villages did not want allotments and did not trouble to cultivate those which were in existence. But labourers

[1] In 1917 there were 3,831 holdings under 50 acres in Cumberland and only 150 over 300 acres. Cmd. 25.

were working very long hours, even the ordinary labourers ; and in the case of horsemen, cowmen, and shepherds, there is little time or energy left for cultivating an allotment, which unfortunately in the days of no compulsory powers were often on poor land and at some distance from the village street. A very tired man who has had lumps of earth sticking to his boots all day is not likely to show much enthusiasm at turning out after his tea or supper to toil on the land again.

On the other hand the cultivation of an allotment was a pleasurable recreation to the man immured in a factory all day, and it was round the outskirts of towns that the growth of allotments was and still is more in evidence.

The most useful allotment a man could have, as Arch with his practical mind pointed out, was behind the back door of the cottage, that is, a garden of half an acre or so, and the larger allotment he had in view was not so much the self-contained small holding, but one which was useful to the odd-jobber, the piece worker, the man who kept a pony, a donkey, or a cow, and was able to choose his master when he had to earn cash wages.

Nothing is more discreditable, politically, to the landed aristocracy of this country in both Houses of Parliament than their opposition to any attempt made by land reformers to give the labourer easy access to an allotment. Though Allotment Acts were passed in 1882 and 1887, and a Small Holdings Act in 1892, it was not until the Local Government Act of 1894 was passed which instituted Parish Councils, that the labourer could secure without many obstacles put in his path an acre of land, and even then he had to pay dearly for it as a rule.

The Allotment Act of 1887, was more satisfactory than the preceding one, in that it gave six parliamentary electors the power to request the sanitary authority to provide allotments for the inhabitants of the district. But whilst this was of some benefit to urban workers who could display more independence of spirit, it required some courage for agricultural labourers to send in a request to a Board of Guardians composed chiefly of farmers hostile to the granting of allotments.

Thus the activity of the men's leaders in the early years of the 'eighties was more political than industrial. In 1884, the English agricultural labourer who had fought all England's battles for her and produced her food, was generously allowed to become an English citizen with power to vote as to how he should be taxed, policed, and governed generally. Arch became a candidate for Parliament and in doing so allied himself definitely with the Liberal Party. Here he made a mistake; but a very natural one in those days when the political party keenest to give the agricultural labourer his vote was the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, Arch carried his Union with him in demanding such reforms as the Disestablishment of the Church, which alienated the sympathies of the many Churchmen who had hitherto supported the Union, and thus the whole of the agricultural trade union movement came to be considered politically as a Radical, anti-Church, Dissenting agitation, rather than as an industrial one.

It was no wonder, though, that Arch felt that the Conservatives were his implacable foes. Sir Stafford Northcote writing on December 3rd, 1883, said:

"I regard with anxiety the attempts which are being made to introduce principles the full bearing of which is not at once obvious, but which are pregnant with the greatest mischief. If the country be brought to agree to an identical franchise based on household suffrage we shall give Mr. Chamberlain all he wants and shall repent our folly, as the trees in the fable repented of having given the woodman a handle for his axe."

Arch was elected to Parliament in November 1885. His election throws some light upon a rural Parliamentary contest in the mid-eighties. The well-to-do Liberals wanted Sir W. Brampton-Gurdon to represent the constituency. The labourers wanted Arch; and when it was put to the vote of the members of the political association, Arch received twice the number of votes that Sir Brampton-Gurdon did. Lord Henry Bentinck was the Conservative opponent, and the Conservatives had held the seat for sixty or seventy years.

"They sent a troop of men down," says Arch, "to one of my

meetings to cripple me. They gave them 5s. and a gallon of beer each ; but it so happened that a new line was being cut to South Lynn and all the navvies knew me—the majority of them had come off the land on to the line. One day the ganger went to Lynn to draw the money to pay the men, and on his way he called in at a public house, and overheard the men who had been sent down by the Tories discussing the best way to pay me out. That night he told the navvies what he had heard, and they all attended my meeting armed with sticks. When the Tory crowd commenced to set about me, the navvies went for them and thrashed them most unmercifully, and the Tory roughs with the navvies' mark on them were regularly cowed and slunk off out of the way. I remember I rode through Lynn to the Town Hall in a donkey cart ; and after the poll had been declared, when I rose to thank the electors for the honour they had conferred upon me, I said that while my opponents with carriages, horses, servants, and all their aristocratic paraphernalia had failed to accomplish their object, Joseph and his brethren had accomplished their object with a donkey cart. That humble donkey had drawn me on to triumph and a majority of 600." [1]

Arch was very proud of the fact that Sandringham was in his constituency. " I said to myself," he wrote, " Joseph Arch, M.P., you see to it that neither the prince nor the labourers have cause to be ashamed of you."

He made his maiden speech in the House of Commons in January, 1886, when he opposed Chaplin's Allotment Bill. His speech was characteristic of him :

" Honourable gentlemen have said that about a quarter of an acre is sufficient for a working man in a village. There may be some working men such as shepherds and carters who perhaps would be contented with a rood of ground ; but I venture to say that a very large number of the labourers in Norfolk—and I am speaking now from my own experience in that county—would only be too glad if they could rent an acre or two at a fair market price. On the other hand, I do not find any human or Divine law which would confine me as a skilled labourer to one rood of God's earth. If I have energy, tact, and skill by which I could cultivate my acre or two, and buy my cow into the bargain, I do not see any just reason why my energies should be crippled and my forces held back, and why I should be content as an agricultural labourer with a rood of ground and my nose to the grindstone all the days of my life." [2]

[1] *Joseph Arch : The Story of his Life told by Himself.*
[2] *Ibid.*

In July, 1886, he lost his seat by twenty votes when the Liberal Party split over Gladstone's Home Rule Bill. He regained his seat in 1892.

It is interesting to learn for what wages a man like Arch worked as principal official of the Union. In the days when the Union flourished he had £3 a week, but from 1879 to the time the Union collapsed his wages were only £2 10s. a week. His election expenses were paid for by wealthy Liberals, and the Union allowed him certain parliamentary expenses, presumably for travelling.

Dr. Jessopp, a friend of George Meredith, and vicar of a country parish in Norfolk, in his interesting book *Arcady*, contended that the agricultural labourer had no political opinions whatever, and that he was intensely local in his sentiments and prejudices. "You can never persuade a Norfolk man that it does not matter where he was born and where he is buried. He belongs to this or that parish. He is a part of its soil. He has nothing whatever to do with the persons living on the other side of the brook." This intense parochialism was characteristic of many country parishes, yet Dr. Jessopp's picture surely was an exaggerated one, even of 1886. Arch's Union had helped men to leap across parish boundaries and brooks, giving the hand of fellowship to the man on the other side of the boundary. Moreover, the election of 1885 was a convincing proof that Hodge was becoming political, for it was his vote that returned Gladstone to power; and yet those who took an active part in this election seemed doubtful as to whether the agricultural labourer even knew the name of Gladstone!

The Rev. W. Tuckwell, Rector of Stockton, Warwickshire, said when addressing about 800 labourers in a village in the Rugby division.

"I was not a little curious as to the political capacity of a purely rustic audience. It was probably the first occasion in English history on which any candidate had visited them; certainly the first effort made to explain to them the issues of the coming contest and the effect which their votes might exercise on their own well-being. Talking with a friendly farmer I had said: 'I doubt if these men ever heard of Gladstone.' 'Try them,' he answered; and early in my speech I sent up the name

as a kite. It met with rapturous response here and everywhere. All over England the rustic belief in him was pathetic ; he was in the words of Virgil's Nisus, the god of their desires ; they believed that he would come like Elias to restore all things ; holding in his hands free education, parish councils, three acres and a cow. His name, and his name alone, won the rural constituencies, and created the parliamentary majority. . . .

"The rapidity of their political growth was astonishing. Ten months before scarcely a single agricultural labourer realised what the franchise meant ; he did not know the value of his vote ; did not believe that it could be secret, or that he could give it against the wish of his employer and landlord."[1]

Both of these country parsons wrote after the General Election of 1885, and both evidently wrote with some exaggeration. That ten months before the election scarcely an agricultural labourer knew what the franchise meant was surely over-estimating his ignorance, for Arch and his colleagues had been agitating for the vote for some years. That the labourer did not believe the ballot could be secret was however generally true, as unfortunately it is true even to-day in some rural districts. Canon Tuckwell tells of the pressure brought to bear upon men who were voting for the first time by making them sign a pledge that they would vote for the Tory candidate. So stern was this fighting parson over this act of political intimidation that he patrolled the village street on election day and threatened with confinement in Warwick jail any employer who dared to intimidate his labourer. His public statement circulated in all the leading papers that if men were asked to make a promise which was illegally obtained, they should without hesitation break their promise at the polling station, aroused a tremendous controversy of moral philosophy which set all the tongues of the impeccable wagging and the pens of the casuists scratching.

That the political education of the agricultural labourer was not complete, as far as the knowledge on which side well-known statesmen stood, may be taken for granted, and that in some counties even Gladstone could not be clearly identified, is illustrated by a story told me by a Sussex school-

[1] *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson.*

master. In the course of a General Election Sir Walter Barttelot was standing as a Tory of the old school for the Horsham Division. A Liberal was opposing him. The schoolmaster asked a Petworth labourer for whom he had voted. "Why, Barttelot; he's the man for the likes of we. I knows *he*." "But," said the schoolmaster, who was a Liberal, "don't you know what party he belongs to?" "Aye; he's for Gladstone, he be." And this happened as late as 1892.

It was natural that in the clamour of political tongues the secession of "Joey Chamberlain," who was their friend in things that mattered to them, from Gladstone, who had shown himself cold to Land Reform in England, the agricultural labourer should feel himself betrayed and should transfer his vote to the other party. Home Rule was to the English agricultural labourer a political abstraction which evoked no enthusiasm; he wanted bread and he was told he should get justice for Ireland first.

There was another writer who could get at the minds of the agricultural labourers more easily than any parson. He was not handicapped by the clerical uniform, and he could sit in the kitchen of a country beerhouse, when he chose, as one of themselves, and speak their own dialect. This was Richard Jefferies, who made a tour of a dozen different counties with the express purpose of finding out the political mind of the labourer. What seemed to impress him more than anything else was that when the labourer was speaking with perfect freedom he took a delight in looking forward to the day when he would be able to plough the squire's "bloody park,"[1] which was certainly one manner of bringing grass land back to cultivation!

In a sense the English labourer never has been political; that is as a House of Commons man understand politics, But he is political in the sense of the Russian peasant, though the Russian peasant may be more wedded to phrases than the son of English soil.

The parting of the ways came in 1886 when Hodge felt that cottages and gardens were slipping away from his grasp

[1] *The Rural Exodus*, by P. Anderson Graham.

for what appeared to him political unrealities, and his enthusiasm for Gladstonian candidates distinctly cooled.

Had Arch stuck to his "last," as in the early days of the Union he declared he was determined to do, when politicians tried to lure him to follow will-o'-the-wisp reforms, he would not have suffered defeat a second time, and his Union, in my opinion, would have had a longer run of prosperity.

"No, thank you," he said to the political reformers in 1872. "I'm for reform as much as anybody, but it's got to be the labourer first, and reform all round after. . . . It's a poor shoemaker that can't stick to his last. Well, to raise the wages, shorten the hours, and make a free man out of a slave is *my* last, and to that last I'll stick as tight as beeswax for the present. Raise a man's material condition to the level of self-respecting decency, and the moral will rise, too." [1]

Thus spoke the shrewd English peasant before his head was slightly turned by the great politicians at Westminster; and in speaking thus he spoke almost the same words as his great predecessor, Cobbett, who said: "I will allow nothing to be good with regard to the labouring classes unless it makes an addition to the victuals, drink, or clothing. As to their minds, that is much too sublime a matter for me to think about."

Dr. Jessopp attributed rural depopulation to the shameful housing conditions. No less than 92,250 labourers in Great Britain had left the land between 1871 and 1881.[2]

"Men do not run away in shoals," he pertinently remarked, "from homes where their childhood was happy. . . . They *do* run away from the odious thought of living and dying in a squalid hovel with a clay floor and two dark cabins under the rafters reached by a ricketty ladder, in the one of which sleep father and mother as best they can, while in the fœtid air of the other their offspring of both sexes huddle, sometimes eight or nine of them, among them young men and young women out of whom you are stamping all sense of shame. Yes, people do run away from a life like this; leaving it behind them as a dreadful past which they remember only with indignation or rebelling against the prospect of it as a future too hideous to be entertained except with scorn. I, for one, do not blame them." [3]

[1] *Joseph Arch: The Story of his Life Told by Himself.*
[2] Census of England and Wales, *General Report*, 1883.
[3] *A cady*, by Augustus Jessopp.

Emigration, though, had gone out of fashion, at any rate amongst the men of Norfolk. It began to be considered derogatory to be an exile. The strong young men went navvying, or into the Police Force, or on to the railway lines, or into the mines. The grown up young men and daughters left the countryside—the youths for the towns and the girls for domestic service. Few cottages seem to have had more than two bedrooms: the exodus was inevitable for those intending marriage.

"I could point," says Dr. Jessopp, "to three disgraceful tenements immediately contiguous to one another, in each of which, by a strange coincidence, there were lately a father, a mother, and seven children all sleeping in a single bedroom. In one case the mother produced an eighth child in the night, her only helper being her daughter, a girl of fourteen, who did her best while the father ran to fetch the midwife.

"The plain, ugly fact is patent to all who do not resolutely keep their eyes shut, that the agricultural labourer's life has had all the joy taken out of it, and has become as dull and sodden a life as a man's can well be made." [1]

"The poor are hovell'd and hustled together, each sex like swine."

Then, as now, it was quite common for labourers to walk two or three miles to their daily work.

"Think of the waste," wrote Dr. Jessopp, "of energy, of muscular tissue, of nerve force, of actual time taken out of what the employer bargains for, or the employed has to give. Think of the weary shambling through the mud, and rain, and blinding sleet and snow, of the wet clothes and the soaked dinner in the basket and the dreary pounding back at night in the dark, to find the baby sick and the doctor having to be fetched, and the roof overhead letting in the steady drip, drip, drip, when the poor sleeper lays himself down at last." [2]

He considered that the tramp who sought his bed in a barn on a bundle of straw had the selection of a better bedroom as a rule than the overcrowded labourers!

Arcady was not all like this. It had its Mayfair and Belgravia as well as its Bermondsey and its Whitechapel, and the best cottages were generally those found on the estates

[1] *Arcady*, by Augustus Jessopp. [2] *Ibid*

large and wealthy owners. The worst cottage owners, then as now, were often those who kept the village shop or the public house and lived much before the world in church or chapel "*They walked with a stick*," as they said in Arcady.

In Warwickshire the returns of the Medical Officer of Health published at this period showed that 20 per cent. of all the cottages in the county possessed only one bedroom each; whilst 50 per cent. had only two bedrooms each Farther north, in Yorkshire and the more northern counties, many cottages consisted of only two rooms, and it would have been difficult for the visitor to discriminate between the kitchen and the sitting-room. Both were fitted with a couple of wooden box beds, which took up nearly half the available space. The mattress was stuffed with chaff from the barn. If the family was a large one, two or three, sometimes of different sexes, would be obliged to sleep in the same bed. Under these beds would be stored the year's potatoes, while in two chests would be kept the flour and oatmeal. Below the table might be a pig in pickle. The one jealously guarded box, when the young men and young women began to court, would be that which contained their Sunday clothes!

The bothy system was much in vogue in the north and of this a pleasing description is given by Mr. Anderson Graham, though one may doubt whether it was typical. It is certainly picturesque, and I should like to quote it in full:—

"A description of one will give those who do not know it some idea of a plan carried out here and there chiefly on very large farms. It had five inmates, all young, unmarried men ranging in age, to judge by appearance, from eighteen to five or six-and-twenty. The building was old and looked like a disused saddle room with a loft to it. When I went the family were just about to have tea. No cloth was on the table, but it and the floor were scrubbed as clean as a ship's deck. They told me that the housework was taken in rotation for a week at a time, he on whom it devolved being for that period the 'Bessie' of the household. He had made the tea, cut and buttered the bread, and was boiling the eggs as I entered. The most diligent housewife might have envied the tidy hearth, the shining fender and fire-irons, the well-brushed pot and kettle. Nor did the sturdy

labourers show themselves blind to the æsthetic element, though a professed 'æsthetician,' as the American journalists call Mr. Oscar Wilde, might possibly have laughed at their decorative effects, and yet even he would have admitted the beauty of a great bunch of red and white roses placed on the table. The wall pictures formed a dream of fair women, and apparently had been cut from calendars, cheap newspapers, and advertisement sheets. As these ploughmen Benedicts took their tea, their eyes were feasted on the features of Miss Fortesque, and Miss Mary Anderson, Miss Maud Millet and the Alhambra ballet girls, in addition to highly idealised Juliets, Beatrices and other stock subjects for the illustration 'given away with this number'.

"The beds were up in what had once been a loft, and were the strong iron variety standing on clean-swept, uncovered deal, and looking clean to say the least of it. Until they came together at the preceding term, they had all been strangers to one another, the men said. They liked the life 'fine,' and did not feel at all dull. On winter nights they amused themselves with draughts, and one of their number played the concertina. Occasionally they moved the table out of their living room and managed to get up a dance. 'With the house servants as partners?' I suggested, and a general smile seemed to show that they were not without female visitors occasionally. Youths placed as they were are almost certain to indulge in more or less wild 'larks,' which, when the prevailing influence happened to be bad, easily degenerated into absolute vice. But with all its drawbacks the bothy system is an improvement on that which it superseded. Not so very long ago each of these men would have been boarded in a strange family where the chances were distinctly in favour of there being a crowded cottage with grown-up women who would have had to sleep, it might be in the same room, but certainly in close proximity to them. It was even worse when a young woman field-worker came into a strange family with full-grown sons. But the more scandalous outrages on decency have now become so rare and are so surely disappearing that it is unnecessary to do more than give them a passing reference." [1]

Dr. Jessopp, too, did not dwell entirely on the seamy side of Arcady. He found great satisfaction in the labourer earning as much as 11s. a week with additional sums at haysel, harvest and turnip hoeing, and a strange exhilaration in the spectacle of four of them driving home from work each in his own donkey cart. He said he felt proud that he was an Englishman when he saw such a sight as that in

[1] *The Rural Exodus*, by P. Anderson Graham.

1887, a sight which he contended marked the English peasant as enjoying a "condition of prosperity" greater than in any other country on the face of the earth! [1]

Farmers who lived hard and adapted themselves to changing conditions seem to have prospered through the depression; whilst the class of tenant farmers who rushed into farming in the golden era of the 'fifties, 'sixties, and early 'seventies, who occupied substantial farmhouses and hunted, those whose sons and daughters despised the day of little things—the dairy, the henhouse and the orchard, went rapidly down hill. They worked less than formerly, kept as many servants, and dressed more extravagantly on their diminishing returns. So much was the dairy neglected that we learn of the difficulty of labourers' wives being able to buy milk in the villages, with the result that the children were improperly nourished, as their fathers were robbed of the opportunity of depasturing a cow on a bit of Common land.

The greatest social change noticed by Dr. Jessopp was in the note of sadness which had settled like a blight on every village, a sadness he attributed to the decay of music and sports. Colour and music had gone out of village life with the disappearance of the parish choir with its sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, clarionet, flute, bass viol and trombone. In place of these they had the wheezy harmonium and the well-groomed choir boys.

"How has the deplorable effacement of our rural music been brought about," he asks. "There is only one answer. "It has been brought about by the general deluge of smug and paralysing respectability which has overrun our country villages. And for this I am bound to say the clergy and their families are in a great measure answerable."

Country clothing had lost its colour, and craft its individuality. Black became the symbol of respectability. Village wakes and fairs, dancing round the maypole, club dinners and wrestling matches were denounced from a thousand pulpits.

"We have become so disgustingly orderly, enlightened, and decently respectable that a farm labourer is a heavy, sancti-

[1] *Arcady*, by Augustus Jessopp.

monious, and thoroughly cowed creature who always puts on a smooth face and pretends to be a very good boy indeed." [1]

As we have seen before the close of the 'eighties, the life of *Under the Greenwood Tree* had entirely disappeared from rural England. The social life which had been evolved out of communal rights had been completely swept away. In its place the labourer had won the right to combine and the right to vote; but so denuded had been the countryside of its most ardent spirits that another generation had to be born before advantage was taken of the one or the other.

Many a county in rural England, indeed, began to bear signs of neglect as though a blight had settled on the countryside. Docks ripening into armouries of seed stained the ill-cultivated fields, and argosies of thistledown sailed unchecked over water-logged land. Grass, unfortunately, with much couch amongst it, crept steadily over the fields of stubble. In ten years one million acres were lost to the plough.

The decay of rural population did not affect one class alone—the labourer—but all classes of rural workers. The village blacksmith had fewer horses to shoe; agricultural implements were bought at the glittering ironmonger's in the nearest town, to which the railway swiftly carried the farmer. The smithy closed down or dispensed with an apprentice, or the smith worked two village forges. He was no longer asked to make scythes, billhooks, or mattocks. His sole business became that of shoeing horses, sharpening the plough coulter, or fitting a new finger to the mowing machine which was now displacing the scythe.

The village carpenter's son did not wait to step into his father's shoes, which were already down at heel in this iron age. His bicycle took him to the town, and he turned up in the village on Sunday with a fashionable billycock, a walking stick and a Waterbury, which played havoc amongst the beribboned lasses who in their turn were beginning to cultivate what is called a "taste." His presence in the village acted with greater and more magical effect

[1] *Arcady*, by Augustus Jessopp.

than the emigration agent. Other young fellows borrowed or purchased the high bicycle ; and this big wheel was not only the symbol, but the actual wheel of fortune which revolutionised the social life of the countryside.

The social customs deriving their enduring qualities from stationary conditions of life were dying out. No longer did parties of men and girls contrive a raid upon a widow in need, cheering her with a feast and leaving much food behind them for the widow's cupboard. Sometimes a fiddler or a player of the concertina would be found and every man would bring his mug or cup and saucer besides food for the feast, and if it was a moonlight night a dance would spring up like magic. This custom was dying out, and so was the dance in the barn following the village wedding, with a fiddler on an up-turned tub and a jug of beer by his side and tallow candles guttering down the stout oaken pillars which supported the roof.

Wayside public houses which throve on the carters who pulled up their heavy loads of corn, or straw, or hay, or cake, were left high and dry by the railroad on the one side and the uncultivated fields on the other. The publican reduced his staff and became more or less a small holder or dealer, to keep himself alive.

The wheelwright's trade languished with that of the carpenter's and blacksmith's ; and how many picturesque wheelwrights' yards shaded by trees with an amplitude of roadside waste there used to be in the 'sixties and 'seventies. The rake-maker began to disappear and with him the besom-maker and the hurdle-maker would take up their tools and seek work in the towns as rakes, brooms, hoops, hurdles and gates commenced to be turned out by machinery in the town timber-yards. The gossipy pedlar, the cottage woman's newsvendor, was driven into the workhouse by the smart traveller who drove out from the towns for orders.

The migration of the "tradesman" class left village life much poorer socially. It took the colour out of rural life. Cricket and football clubs declined in spite of the herculean efforts of athletic curates, and the inspiring example of Charles Kingsley. Dreary England had taken the

place of Merrie England; the only emotional excitement seeming to lie in the direction of religious revivals. I remember asking in a village what had become of the sexton. The reply was he had gone to Pulborough in Sussex, which was "altogether a livelier place because he had had two funerals in a fortnight."

There were no holidays except enforced ones on wet days and such as a hiring fair or mop fair. The half-holiday, in spite of Arch's efforts, had not yet been won by the organised workers. Plough Monday in Lincolnshire, when the labourers carried round a coulter decorated with ribbons and collected money for a supper was still in vogue, it is true, and in corners of Lancashire country folk could still be found merry enough to perform a mutilated Easter Play, as a prelude for asking for the Pace or Paschal eggs that once upon a time were sought all over the county.

But these isolated gatherings appeared more like ghosts at a feast over a decaying rural England which in days gone by, we are told, was merry. At any rate, we know that once upon a time, as Walter de Henley says in his *Dite de Hosebonderie*, "you know that there were in the year fifty-two weeks. Now take away eight weeks for holidays and other hindrances then are there forty-four working weeks left," which points to the fact that in the feudal days the English labourer had more holidays than when he became a "free" man.

It was not only the disappearance of the labourer and the village tradesman which depleted rural life. The ruined small yeoman farmer's homestead was vacated; his little farm as well as that of many a tenant farm was engrossed. The bailiff began to occupy the better farmhouse whilst the inferior ones of the bankrupt farmer were occupied by the teamster, shepherd, or cowman and his family.

No greater condemnation of the dullness of village life could be made than that of a writer in 1891: "The rustic goes to town in part to revive his dying capacity for laughter."[1]

[1] *The Rural Exodus*, by P. Anderson Graham

PART FIVE

THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

THE 'NINETIES.

The "revolt of the field" of 1872 was a spontaneous act on the part of the agricultural labourer. It started, as we have seen, by a group of labourers asking Joseph Arch, one of themselves, to be their leader, and although the townsman element was imported into the movement, its history shows that it was purely an agrarian uprising. Its rank and file sprang from the hedgerow, and its leader was the champion hedge-cutter of England. Not only were its members, but its organisation was distinctly rustic in character. Branches sprang up suddenly in out-of-the-way villages like mushrooms in the night; strikes were declared by little village communities who rarely saw an organiser or consulted a leader. Though it received large sums of money from sympathetic townsmen, no one could say that Arch's movement was organised from the towns.

The new trade union movement in the early 'nineties, however, is a different story. In 1889 the great Dock Strike occurred, followed by the gasworkers' strike, and the town leaders of the Dockers' Union and of the Gasworkers' Union discovered to their cost the danger to the unskilled town labourer of leaving unorganised the ill-paid agricultural labourers, who were continually deserting the countryside to fight for a crust of bread at the dock gates, or at the fiery jaws of great gas retorts. The dockers' delegates brought up the question of organising the farm labourer at the Trade Union Congress, with the result that during 1890 their Union and the Navvies' Union sent organisers into Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, and the Home counties, whilst

the Gasworkers' Union, skirmished round about country towns.

Yet it was not from town trade unions that the most constant evangelists issued, preaching a new economic doctrine year after year, and who did most to revive the spirit of organisation amongst agricultural labourers. These new missionaries entered remote villages in the eastern, southern, and midland counties, not by trains, or on bicycles, but in gipsy vans, some painted red and others painted yellow; the difference in the two colours being that the "reds" wished to restore the land to the people by means of the Single Tax, whilst the "yellows" wished to accomplish this by means of nationalisation. For landowners it was a choice between a Red or Yellow Peril.

The Land Nationalisation Society took the initiative in 1889 with open-air meetings in the Wisbech and Swaffham districts. In 1890 Mr. Hyder made a journey with the Land and Labour Lecture Cart through Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and thence to Leicestershire, and back through Northamptonshire and Cambridge to Dereham in Norfolk. It was in 1891 that the first Red Van appeared in Suffolk, sent out by the English Land Restoration League with the object of obtaining reports on the conditions of rural life and at the same time of assisting the newly formed Eastern Counties Labour Federation to organise farm workers; and in the same year the first Yellow Van surprised the rustics of Middlesex, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Somersetshire; and keeping up the gipsy tradition toured through Wales and thence across the north Midlands to Sutton in Lincolnshire.

In the following years, and indeed right up to the outbreak of the great war, the Land Nationalisation Society sent out its Yellow Vans not only through the Midlands and the north of England, but even as far north as Edinburgh.

The Land Nationalisation Society did not attempt to organise the labourers, but only asked them to show their acceptance of the principles of land nationalisation by holding up their hands. The lecturers, however, soon

found that labourers, standing under the eyes of their employers and others, evinced a dislike to a manifestation of their opinions, and adopted a plan of inviting those who were against the resolution to put their hands up, and those who were in favour of it to keep their hands down.

The Red Vans travelled whilst funds lasted, and that was from 1891 to 1897. The English Land Restoration League started organising labourers from the very beginning. Indeed they entered Suffolk at the express invitation of the newly formed (1890) Eastern Counties Labour Federation, which enrolled 3,000 members in one year (eventually the membership reached 17,000), though it is probable that some of these members were men who worked in the towns, such as Ipswich.

Friendly gipsies fraternising with the Red Vanners, and assuming that they had something to sell, would tell them that Suffolk, where wages were low, was a poor county for trade; and that better business was to be done in the Fenlands!

At the beginning of the 'nineties the most important union was the Eastern Counties Federation, the strength of which lay in Suffolk. In Northumberland, Cumberland, and Lancashire trade unions were unknown. Arch's Union had sunk to 2,254 members; whilst an offshoot breaking away from the parent society was formed in Norfolk in 1889. This was called the Norfolk and Norwich Agricultural Labourers' Union, and Mr. George Edwards became its secretary.

But with the advent of the Red Van into country districts, unions soon began to crop up in Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, and Herefordshire, detached from one another and without any central organisation.

Mr. Verinder, the secretary of the Land Restoration League, considered that the weakness of Arch's Union lay in its centralisation, and that farm labourers became restless and suspicious of an organisation which had its offices and executive at some distant town which rendered control ineffective and kept members out of touch with their leaders.

Under the impetus of the new union movement the old Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union[1] sprang into life again, and the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, though now confined largely to Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, under stimulus of the Red and Yellow Vans increased its membership from 2,454 in 1889 to 14,000 in 1890.

In spite of the rise of the Eastern Counties Federation, farmers were lowering wages by 1s. a week in Suffolk and Norfolk in the autumn of 1892 and the spring of 1893, and strikes took place on several large farms.

Although strikes have their tragical side they rarely take place without some display of that English humour which has made our working class the most tolerant and orderly working class in the world, even when provoked to disorder by the presence of mounted police armed with batons.

An incident that occurred at St. Faith's—a village four miles out of Norwich, which became a storm centre of recurring agitation—illustrates that kind of English horse-play, half serious and half fun, characteristic of our race. This incident, however, had a dramatic ending.

A strike took place about 1889. The agricultural labourers involved were then members of John Ward's Navvies' Union, and about a dozen men were imported from Yarmouth as strike-breakers and housed in shepherds' huts. Naturally, these men were not received with any cordiality by the villagers, who saw their bread and butter going into other mouths. St. Faith's is a village which has always been noted for its band, and the bandsmen playing a merry tune, followed by the rest of the villagers, marched up one night to the shepherds' huts, and without much ceremony made captive the men. Mr. G. E. Hewitt (now a respected member of the Agricultural Wages Board and the Norfolk County Council) who was then eighteen years of age (I have no doubt he was one of the ringleaders), tells me that they marched the unfortunate blacklegs down to the village

[1] An old banner of this Union was discovered at the *Moon and Stars*, Preston, Kent, in 1919, by Mr. Baker, the county organiser of the N.A.L.U., and Mr. Baker has it in his possession.

green where a fish hawker named Furness assumed the leadership.

Furness, who was a dissenter of a pronounced type, said to the crowd : " Now look here. Let's have a touch of the Salvation Army about this," and taking the big drum and placing it on the ground he threw a shilling on to it. " Let us collect enough money to send these men back to their homes in Yarmouth," he said. Sufficient money for this purpose was subscribed and it was decided to march the men into Norwich railway station next morning, and during the night the men were locked up in a cottage and a guard stationed round it.

Early the next morning, at the call of the bugle and the beat of the drum, with cheers from the villagers, the men were marched into Norwich, and from that station they were returned to the bosoms of their families and never reappeared.

But the farmers had their revenge on the fish hawker. They displayed no animus against the farm labourers, for probably the incident was talked over at many a bar parlour with a gust of grim laughter in admiration of the audacity of the labourers. But the fish hawker was not a farm labourer. What business was it of his ? Besides, he was a ranter, and a ranter was disliked almost as much in those days as a trade union agitator ; so he was summoned and put out of harm's way for four months at the expense of the taxpayers of the country.

A subscription was immediately raised in Norwich, and when the fish hawker had served his four months (becoming no doubt in that period a more convinced rebel than ever,) his exit from the prison gates was made with musical honours and a presentation of a purse of £80. His return to St. Faith's was triumphal.

In the Annual Report of the Eastern Counties Federation for 1892 occurs the following passage :—

" The present distressed condition of many farmers is brought about by their own conduct towards their agricultural labourers, and the sooner they alter their course of action and treat their working-men as human beings, and as Christians, instead of

making slaves of them and treating them worse than cattle, as they have done in the past, the better it will be ; we may then get on the highway to agricultural prosperity. . . .

" The farmers of Suffolk are just now forcing the labourers into rebellion. We have offered peaceful arbitration, and some of the farmers have returned our kindly offer in insulting language. Still, they are members of Christian Churches : no wonder at our churches being unpopular."

Though it managed to achieve a membership of 17,000 this Union must have had an uphill fight against declining corn prices and the repeated attempts of farmers to lower wages. Its financial basis of 1d. a week was too weak to fight foes supported by their bastions of farm-tied cottages.

The farmers now formed in Norfolk a union for their " mutual protection and benefit," one of the objects being to assist its members in the event of a strike. Possibly farmers were somewhat scared by the programme of the Eastern Counties Federation, which contained items betraying its urban genesis.[1] Possibly the Union ship was carrying too much sail, could not ride the Atlantic breakers, and so foundered in 1895.

But this stimulus projected from the town proved to be artificial and short-lived. By 1896 one might say that the English agricultural labourer was left destitute of any kind

[1] The programme was as follows :—
Parish Councils wanted in the villages.
Paid Members of Parliament.
Boards of Guardians : abolish them. Why not ?
Old Age Pensions for men and women over 60 years.
Farming Companies and Co-operative Societies.
Tax uncultivated land to its full value.
More scientific farming wanted.
Compulsory cultivation of land.
Co-operative farming and federation trading.
Labour representatives on all public authorities.
A proportion of working men as magistrates.
Religious equality.
Tax mansions and deer forests to their full value.
Land-law reforms ; State to own the land.
Better wages for agricultural labourers.
Better homes for the workers ; excessive rents reduced.
Arbitration in trade disputes in place of strikes.
Arbitration in place of wars.
Steam tramways constructed by County Councils.
Municipal workshops and work for the unemployed.
County Council farms.
Regular employment for all working men.

deficiency be filled? How could the income be raised? I had long seen two things clearly; first, that at the door of every poverty-stricken village lay an unworked silver mine in the village land; secondly that to yield its ore this mine must be worked under certain definite conditions." [1]

Thus the Radical parson. It is clear that if 21 does not go in to 15, how much less does it go into 9 or 10? But were these the wages paid at this time? Let us now turn to the pages of Mr. T. E. Kebbel, a trusted exponent of the aristocratic view of the land question. In his *English Country Life*, published in 1891, he says:—

"It appears on the whole, that the total yearly income of an ordinary English day labourer, including both wages and perquisites of every kind, ranges from about £50 a year in Northumberland to a little over £30 in Wiltshire, and other south-western counties. This gives an average of £40 a year. But it is only the exceptionally low wages paid in a few counties which pulls down the average even so low as this. In the eastern midland, northern, and south-eastern counties it is commoner to find the sum total rising to £43, and £44, than sinking to £37 or £38. Shepherds, wagoners, and stockmen are paid at a higher rate, and their wages average about £50 a year."

Even if this statement were correct the Wiltshire or south-western county labourer would get but a grim satisfaction out of a national average of £40 a year or more paid in other counties when he had to sustain life on £30 a year.

Against this evidence we have that of Mr. Millin.[2]

"In Essex," he says, "so far as I have seen it, I don't think it would be far wrong to put down the income of an able-bodied labourer at from £5 to £10 in harvest, and for the rest of the year 10s. or 11s. a week when in work."

Mr. Millin was a special commissioner for the *Daily News*, and Mr. Anderson Graham writing at the same time, in contrasting the statement made by a Tory and a Radical journalist, attributes the divergence between the wages stated by each to the sources of information. He says that the Radical journalist gets his information from the labourer, who is tempted to put his wages at a low figure,

[1] *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, by the Rev. W. Tuckwell
[2] *Life in our Villages*, also published in 1891.

and that the Tory commissioner goes "to the farmer, squire and the parson, and all three of them are inclined to take an exaggerated view of Hodge's income,"—especially in valuing the payments in kind.

The latter criticism is damaging to the official figures issued from time to time by the Board of Trade,[1] for they are made from statements given to the investigators by farmers, though doubtless these have been to a certain extent checked by questions put to labourers. Mr. Graham assumes that the agricultural labourer is inclined to make himself out to be a poorer man than he really is. My own experience is in the very opposite direction. I am cautious about accepting any statement made to me by a farm worker as to his wages, because I find he is inclined, like any other man in any other class of society, to state his income higher than it really is. He is indeed, as a rule, ashamed of his poverty, and if his cash wages are very low, this feeling prompts him to represent that he has certain "privileges," otherwise he would not stay on at his job. On further investigation, I generally find these "privileges" do not amount to much.

Being on friendly terms with almost all my neighbours who work on the land, I have the same diffidence in asking a labourer the extent of his income as I have in asking a member of the professional classes, and the information has to come to me unsolicited, or, through the medium of the wives. Information is much more likely to be obtained by questioning one labourer about another labourer's earnings, though, of course, when one visits new neighbourhoods one is less shy of questioning, and as a rule, the farm worker is more inclined to be frank to a sympathetic stranger than to any one living in his own parish.

Though the author of *The Rural Exodus* questions the accuracy of Mr. Millin, who he thinks might have been biassed by his "Radical" views, he admits himself that he found farm labourers in Gloucestershire

[1] Official information was gleaned from three sources: (1) Chairmen of Poor Law Unions, (2) "Agriculturists," (3) Farmers; but probably (1) and (2) were indistinguishable from (3).

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"who have not more than 10s. a week in money and perquisites that certainly do not come to 2s. more, wherewith themselves and a young family have to be fed and dressed and lodged. How they manage to thrive in health as they do, is a mystery."

"Again," he adds, "in the neighbouring county of Wilts there is equal hardship. There are many neatly-thatched picturesque dwellings cosily hidden in nooks of the Downs, in dales through which the running water has fretted a channel, where the income is not so large. On the east coast there are even worse cases. Norfolk and Suffolk give me the impression of being at the present moment the most wretched of agricultural counties, so far as the labourers are concerned. It was only in East Anglia that I found actual cases of able-bodied men keeping their families on a wage of eighteen-pence a day, Sundays not included. Game preservers complain of the amount of poaching that goes on, but one can hardly wonder at it. A man who has not meat to his dinner more than once out of seven times, is under strong temptation to fill his pot with the first wild thing he can lay hands on. Yet I could give the addresses of agricultural labourers in Essex, Hertfordshire, and even Berkshire, where the family income is not much in excess of what I have mentioned. The extraordinary contrasts presented by the various shires tend to produce a feeling of scepticism in regard to averages. Sufficient statistics to make them trustworthy have not yet been collected, and it would be a difficult task to do so." [1]

The aristocrat amongst farm workers south of the Trent, was the man who had charge of horses, sheep, or cattle all the year round without incurring any loss for wet days and enjoying harvest money and cottage accommodation. Such, for instance, was the ploughman in Essex as described by Mr. James Macdonald, whose revised edition of *The Book of the Farm* appeared in 1891.

	£	s.	d.
Fifty-two weeks at 14s. per week	36	8	0
Extra for haymaking	1	10	0
Do. in harvesting	3	10	0
Cottage	5	0	0
Firewood, beer money, etc., say	1	2	0
Total	£47	10	0

"This is the rate for the best men," says Mr. Macdonald. "Ordinary men get about 1s. a week less." If, however,

[1] *The Rural Exodus*, by P. Anderson Graham.

one were to put down the number of hours worked by men in charge of live stock one would probably find that the rate worked out at less per hour than the wages earned by the ordinary labourer. "In the neighbourhood of London," he adds, "the rate of wages is higher by two or three shillings a week. On the other hand, in the counties away from London the rate is lower, 10s., 11s., 12s. per week, with similar perquisites being paid in several English counties."

The official summary of the situation was that "the labourer was better fed, his education and language improved, his amusements less gross, his cottage generally improved, though generally on small estates there were very bad ones still left."[1]

Weekly wages ranged from 10s. in Wilts and Dorset to 18s. in Lancashire, and averaged 13s. 6d. for the whole country,[2] and Mr. W. C. Little, the Senior Assistant Commissioner in 1893, put the hours worked at 10 and 10½ a day for ordinary labourers, and at 12½ hours a day in summer and 11¾ in winter for horsemen and cowmen.

In contrasting the conditions of the northern and eastern counties Mr. Wilson Fox[3] summed up the position thus :—

"The wages paid in the eastern counties are nominally much lower than those in the three northern counties I visited, but the actual wages received by an eastern counties' labourer, greatly depend on whether he is in the service of a farmer who employs him in wet weather, and gives him work to do by the piece. If he is so fortunate, his nominal cash wages of 11s. or 12s. a week are frequently converted into 15s., 16s., and 17s. a week, harvest of course being included. He may also be living on a large estate, where he gets a good cottage and garden for £2 10s. or £3. Thus, under favourable circumstances, a Norfolk or Suffolk labourer is in receipt of a wage which reaches that of a married man in Cumberland, but, owing to the uncertainty and irregularity of the payments, the possibility of earning such a wage is seldom recognised by the men or credited by the public.

"On the other hand, a man in the service of a farmer who sends him back in wet weather, employs him irregularly in the

[1] *Royal Commission on Labour*, 1893–4, XXXV., Index 5, *et seq.*
[2] *Parliamentary Reports*, 1897, XV., 31
[3] *Royal Commission on Labour*, C. 6894, III.

winter time, and finds no piece-work for him, is in an infinitely poorer position, for under these circumstances he may lose 1s. to 2s. a week, from his weekly wages of 11s. or 12s., but even then his wages would be higher than the nominal one when harvest money, amounting to £7 10s. and £9 for a month's work, is taken into consideration."

It is probable that all these authorities were right; that is to say each of them found instances of men being paid the wages stated, however divergent one writer may be from another, for if there is one thing that is true, it is that the wages of farm workers have had very little relation to prices of farm products and to the current prices of unskilled labour in other trades. Wages of agricultural labourers have indeed been a matter of custom, varying not only in one county from another but also from one parish to another, and even from one employer to another. And as we have seen wages were lower in the "golden era" of the 'fifties and 'sixties than in the depression of the 'eighties and 'nineties.

Custom has largely been fostered by the patriarchal system lingering longer in agriculture than in any other industry, of a considerable portion of the weekly wage being paid in kind, such as cottage accommodation, or board and lodging, or litter for pigs, or potato ground or milk and other allowances; each generation of labourers showing a pathetic dependence upon the generosity of the farmer.

Arch's Union was said to have destroyed good feeling between master and man. But Arch stoutly denied before the Commission of 1881 that this good feeling existed at any time. Whether this be true or not the gulf between labourer and farmer was widening, firstly by the enrichment of farmers in the 'sixties and then again during the depression when three or four farms in very many districts were thrown into one and the small holder was squeezed out.

There can be little doubt that wages at the beginning of the 'nineties were scandalously low. The *Daily News* Commissioner's investigations which extended beyond Essex into Suffolk, Norfolk, Oxford, Berkshire and Bucks, were challenged on the attitude of parsons towards

unions (which was improving since Arch's time), but were not challenged as to the accuracy of the rate of wages stated, in spite of the publicity given in the columns of a daily paper. Close on his heels too came the lecturers of the English Land Restoration League, whose business it was to find out rates of wages and other conditions, and as we shall see their report confirmed that of Mr. Millin.

It was no wonder that labourers who were accustomed to horses left the land to become grooms; that is to say, left 11s. a week to earn 25s. or 30s. in a more agreeable manner; and in this the young labourer was encouraged by his sweetheart, for we must bear in mind that it was she (*cherchez la femme*) who was more responsible for the depopulation of the countryside than any Government. One who had been a labourer put the case very pertinently when he wrote to the *Daily News*:—

"My sweetheart is too nice a girl to keep in a hovel on 10s. a week, so I must seek a warmer clime, for English charity is too cold for me to thrive on." And the labourer's sweetheart would know from the experiences of her own father that there was no prospect for her husband of higher wages, however skilled he might become, and that nearly every farm lane led eventually to the distant workhouse.

Mr. Anderson Graham said that "in the autumn of 1891 you could drive fifteen miles through Norfolk without passing a tenanted farm; and Mr. Millin describes the deserted villages which lay between Wickford to Althorne and Southminster—a district that became familiar to me a few years later—as "A more dreary and depressing stretch of badly farmed crops and land out of cultivation, dilapidated cottages and deserted fields, it would be difficult to find." And it was not only from parishes where the farms were badly cultivated, cottages dilapidated, and the squire and parson indifferent to social conditions that the young men were streaming into the towns or the colonies. In a model village, as that of St. Stisted in the same county, where the squire took a pride in designing cottages and the rector was a large-hearted and liberal-minded friend of the people,

the tramp, tramp, tramp of the young labourer was noted with alarm. Yet even in Stisted men were only getting 11s. in summer and 10s. in winter!

Apart from low wages and the absence of any prospects in life, the school, the penny newspaper, the postage stamp, and the bicycle were active agents in luring the young from the villages.

In Suffolk Mr. Millin found that, in the village of Barnham, wages were slightly better than in any other neighbourhood he visited. Labourers were "getting 12s. a week—a fraction over 2¼d. an hour it comes to—and £7 10s. for the harvest." As he says, "one cannot but suspect in moving about these rural districts that the wages received by the people really have little or no relation either to what they earn or to what the master can afford to pay."

The Duke of Grafton was the owner of Barnham. He paid his labourers better than most of the landowners in the neighbourhood and his cottages were good and cheap. The fly in his ointment was a little Primitive Methodist Chapel, which being forbidden a footing, was eventually erected on wheels by a sturdy peasant who paid the penalty for his daring by lack of employment and an exile from his village lasting some years!

In another village governed by a benevolent despot—this time the vicar's wife—every cottage woman had a blanket loaned to her for the winter, which was taken out of a calico bag sewn up with string and sealed with black wax. In March every blanket was put back into its calico bag for the summer. The owner of this property was Lord de Saumarez. In this district 10s. a week was the reigning rate of pay, and one young man of twenty was receiving only 8s.

On the Duke of Marlborough's estate at Woodstock the rate of pay for summer was 12s. a week, and in the same county of Oxfordshire 10s. was being paid as the normal summer rate, which sank in winter to 9s. It should be remembered that this winter pay was subject to deductions upon wet days by certain farmers in some districts. Nowhere did he find any survival of the old-fashioned

Harvest Home, nor of the Sheep-shearing Supper, nor the Hay Harvest Supper.

"The Union killed that," the farmers would tell him; but the Union also killed 7s. a week for a man and his family, half of it paid in unsaleable corn dealt out at a good stiff profit. He found evidences in Oxfordshire, in spite of the suspicion against agitators and the break-up of the old "National Union," of a general desire for a new union, and "that a young man from the Dockers' Union was listened to eagerly."

In Berkshire he visited the estate of Lord Wantage, who owned about 22,000 acres of land, embracing the villages of Lockinge and Ardington. Lord Wantage was perhaps the finest type of the benevolent landlord to be found in England. The cottages were good and charmingly designed. Allotments were abundant. The villages not only had their reading rooms, but also their co-operative stores and bakery, and their own public houses, where the sale of drink was not pushed and where soup in winter, and tea and coffee were always to be had.

Yet here wages were only 10s. a week and the profits yielded by the farms only brought a bonus of 2s. a week to the labourers. Everything on the estate was clean and orderly, even the pig was considered an undesirable occupant of a Wantage cottage-garden and was forbidden unless kept on the allotment. Apparently, every one moved about Lockinge and Ardington a model of respectability, but with just the air of persons who had asked permission to inhabit the earth. Politics were rigidly excluded from the beautifully kept public house. "They durnt blow their noses at Ard'n'ton without the bailiff's leave," remarked a labourer in the neighbourhood.

Examples of benevolent despotism are given in the Red Van Report of 1893. In Bulford, Wilts, an agreement was enforced between the owner of the estate and the cottagers which stipulated that

"the landlord reserves the right for himself or his agent of entering upon the said premises at any time between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. to view the condition thereof, and, if found

necessary, to leave notice of all defects and repairs necessary to be done. The landlord reserves to himself the right to stipulate what portion, if any, of the garden shall be used for the cultivation of flowers, and the tenant hereby agrees to use such portion for that purpose only."

The difficulty of working the forthcoming Local Government Act of 1894 on democratic lines was foreseen by the Van lecturers when it came to "close" parishes.

"The village and parish of Stanton St. Bernard, in East Wilts, is the property of the Rt. Hon. George Robert Charles Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery and Baron Herbert of Cardiff, J.P.; High Steward of Wilton; of Carlton House Terrace, London; Wilton House, Salisbury, and Mount Merion, Co. Dublin; and of the Carlton, Eton and Harrow, St. James', Marlborough and Travellers' Clubs. His lordship is lord of the manor, sole (absentee) land "owner," patron of the living, receiver of rent and tithe. Of the nearly 2,000 acres of land in the parish about 40 are glebe. The noble owner lets the rest, together with all the cottages, to two farmers. The two farmers, besides controlling the cultivation of all the land in the parish, and the tenancy of practically all the cottages, are the churchwardens, and overseers of the poor and the school managers. One of them has charge of the rate book. Nothing could well be simpler than this system of parish government. The labourer who wants to work in the parish must obtain employment on the Earl of Pembroke's land under one of the Earl of Pembroke's two farmers, who will house him in one of the Earl's cottages, deducting the rent from his weekly wages. He sends his children to the 'national' school (managed by the Earl of Pembroke's farmers), and 'goes on Sunday to the Church' where, under the eyes of the two churchwardens (Lord Pembroke's farmers again), he 'sits under' a clergyman appointed to the parish (by the Earl of Pembroke). When he gets too old to work, or is reduced to hopeless poverty by misfortune, he must apply for Poor Law relief to the same two farmers. If, in spite of all these arrangements for his comfort he is still discontented with his lot, there is no building—not even a schoolroom which is largely subsidised out of the taxes—in which he can meet to take counsel with his fellows, unless he first obtains the permission of the Earl of Pembroke's farmers. If the parish of Stanton St. Bernard were a slave estate, owned by the Earl of Pembroke and managed by two overseers on the Earl's behalf, the condition of the inhabitants could hardly be more completely one of slavery than it is to-day." [1]

[1] *Among the Agricultural Labourers with the Red Vans*, 1893.

When the van visited Stoke Gifford, owned by the Duke of Beaufort, not a single inhabitant dared to avow himself a sympathiser of the Red Van, and it appears that not even a Tory, if he made himself unpopular with the Duke, was permitted to take office in any public capacity.

"At a vestry meeting in 1894 the parishioners of Stoke Gifford elected as their churchwarden Admiral Close, a local Tory. The Duke, who objected to the Admiral, apparently on the ground of some difference of opinion as to the restoration of the parish church, thereupon gave notice to all his tenants to quit and yield up all their holdings. In reply to an appeal for mercy from his tenants his Grace wrote on May 11, 1894: 'Now, on one condition only will I withdraw the notices which each of you have received, and it is this—that Admiral Close resigns his churchwardenship, or if he cannot legally do so, that he appoints one of you to be his deputy or sidesman, and that he gives me in writing his undertaking not to interfere with the repairs, etc., of the parish church, and not to attend any parish meetings called in reference to anything to do with the church. If this is not done we shall postpone the repairs until his term of office expires, and the notices to quit your farms will stand good. I hope such will not have to be the case. (*Signed*, BEAUFORT).'

"Rather than let the helpless tenants suffer, Admiral Close, protesting against the 'unconstitutional coercion' accepted these conditions, and appointed George Parker (farmer) as his sidesman." [1]

Yet the Duke of Beaufort was a good landlord, who paid 12s. a week to his labourers, with half pay when they were sick, and pensioned off all his old servants at from 5s. to 8s. a week.

Not even so good a landlord as the Duke of Bedford was free from the weaknesses which come from overlordship. He made it one of the conditions of letting allotments to labourers that "no occupier who is at work for any Employer will be allowed to work upon his Land after Six in the Morning, or before Six in the Evening, without permission from his master," to which was added, "All occupiers will be expected to conduct themselves with propriety at all times, and to bring up their families in a decent and orderly manner."

[1] *Bristol Mercury*, 5th July 1894.

Near Didcot men of a certain village were working for 9s. a week, and in the adjoining village for 10s. a week. Near Wycombe in Bucks was found a man with a young family of six, whose wages did not average 8s. a week.

In Bedfordshire wages appeared to be 12s. a week with 2s. or 3s. more for cowmen and horsemen with Sunday work to do. In the correspondence columns of the *Daily News* a Leicestershire farmer stated his wagoner was paid 19s. per week, his cowman 18s. and his labourers 16s. to 17s. all the year round.

Though Millin made his tour in these counties during harvest time, when drink was more abundant than at any other period of the year, he found little evidence of drunkenness amongst labourers, despite the fact that he mixed freely with them at all hours in the taprooms of public houses. He said they drank too much, but even when closing time came men as a rule moved with ordinary precision out of the taproom into the open street.

When in the same year of 1891 the lecturers of the English Land Restoration League went into Suffolk with the Red Van they found that wages were from 10s. to 12s. a week with harvest money averaging from £7 to £9. In a short time the newly formed Union, the Eastern Counties Federation, raised wages 1s. a week. Cottages were let at from £3 to £6 a year.

The reason why the League decided to send out its lecturers in vans was because of the difficulty in those days of obtaining the use of village halls. The labourers read newspapers but rarely at this time, and the only way to reach them was by means of meetings. Most of the meetings were attended by from 100 to 300 labourers, and many of the farmers, especially those who employed the most labour and paid the best wages, were, on the whole, friendly. Difficulty in finding a pitch for the van was experienced where the village was owned by one man, which led in 1892 to an exhibition of despotic ruling by a landowner, Lord Bateman.

"The organising secretary of the League obtained permission from the landlord of the *Bateman Arms*, Shobdon, Herefordshire,

to hold a meeting in the large room of the inn, for the purpose of forming a branch of the Herefordshire Agricultural and General Workers' Union. On arriving at the inn on the night of the meeting he was informed that his lordship's secretary had called and pointed out a clause in the lease which forbade any meeting being held without his lordship's special permission. A similar visit had been paid to every tenant holding a field or orchard under Lord Bateman, who owns the whole village. An attempt to hold a meeting on the waste land was prevented by the superintendent of the County Police, who was accompanied by a constable, on the ground that Lord Bateman, as lord of the manor, claimed the control of all the waste land ; and the police —apparently acting under the instructions of his lordship as Lord Lieutenant of the County—similarly prevented the holding of a meeting in the public highway." [1]

This year the League sent out five vans on the road, which went to work in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire and Herefordshire, and the lecturers formed unions in all these counties. Mr. Verinder, the secretary of the League, thought that it was not wise to attempt to revive Arch's National Union owing to the suspicions still rife,—suspicions that had been sedulously fostered by squire, parson and farmer,—that Arch and his paid agitators had robbed the men, and Mr. Verinder believed that, owing to the neglect of sufficient supervision by a centralised organisation, success would be more easily achieved by autonomously governed federations of unions. Nevertheless these county unions which sprang up like mushrooms suffered a rapid decline on the financial basis of a penny a week subscription.

However, they had their day, and they kept the idea of organisation alive in the breast of the agricultural labourer, and sowed the seed which began to be harvested some twenty years later.

In the *Church Reformer*, August, 1891, it is stated that in some of the Suffolk villages a flourishing branch of Arch's National Union was still to be found. Parsons, it appeared, still held aloof from meetings such as these. "Only on one occasion did the parson think it well to hear for himself what the agitators from London were telling his flock."

[1] *Among the Agricultural Labourers with the Red Vans*, 1892.

The women seem to have possessed more spirit than the men. "Ah, sir," they often said, "if the men had only stuck to the Union as Mr. Arch wanted them to—but the men are such cowards. I tell my man that he won't do any good to himself or to anybody else until he joins the Union." [1]

The public house was the People's Parliament, and the most independent place in the village. Very little drunkenness was witnessed. The English Land Restoration League did not encourage strikes, but attempted to educate the labourers to get what they wanted by means of the vote. Parish Councils were in the air, and much was hoped from the Act which became law in 1894.

Through the generosity of a subscriber, the Red Vans were able to continue their work until 1897, and their Reports are exceedingly interesting documents of life in the eastern and southern counties as viewed from the standpoint of the labourer's advocate. In the Report issued in 1893 we find the following statement on rates of wages :—

"The ordinary wages of a day labourer in East and South Wilts are generally about 10s. a week (1s. 8d. a day), but 9s., and even 8s. only, are paid by some employers. Over the greatest part of Hertfordshire 11s. and 12s. are paid to the daymen, or, where a cottage is provided, a shilling a week less. The wages in the parts of Norfolk visited this year are about the same as in Hertfordshire.[2] The formation of the Labourers' Union in Berkshire had the effect, during last winter and summer, of preventing a reduction below the figures quoted in last year's report. Weekly wages of 13s., 14s., and 15s. are common in Warwickshire ; often the pay is lower, and sometimes higher ; but cottages are considerably dearer than in the other counties."

The wages above quoted were summer wages, subject in most instances to a reduction of 2d. a day in winter, when the total weekly earnings were still further reduced by the greater irregularity of employment, the labourers being usually paid only for the days they are actually at work.

[1] *Church Reformer*, July, 1891.

[2] This is confirmed by a statement made by Alderman Geo. Edward in 1893. Mr. Wilson Fox put them at 12s. or 13s. a week.

Wages in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Somersetshire, and Herefordshire averaged from 11s. to 12s. a week, with in some cases a cottage free. There were special instances of the men in Herefordshire getting 16s. to 17s. In Somersetshire, in certain districts, wages were as low as 9s. a week, and in one district as high as 16s. a week. In Berkshire, at the village of Upton, the wage was only 8s. a week, while at Wokingham the maximum was 16s. a week. In East Berks wages varied from 9s. to 11s. and from 12s. to 14s. a week. Although the labourer's ordinary wages in Wiltshire were 10s. a week, we learn [1] that head shepherds received 12s. a week, and provided they reared, on the average, 90 lambs every year from each 100 ewes, they received 40s. per annum extra. This entailed a good deal of overtime. Under-shepherds had 11s. a week, and smaller bonuses. Forty-two branches of the Wiltshire Agricultural and General Labourers' Union with a membership of 1,400 were formed in 1892 and 1893.

In Wilts a very objectionable form of agreement between master and servant was in vogue (vide *Church Reformer*, July, 1893). A question was asked in the House of Parliament with regard to this agreement and the illegality of the fines and deductions. The Home Secretary's reply was to the effect that the fines were not illegal, but the deductions were.

Men in charge of horses and cattle were usually paid 1s. a week over and above daymen's wages, with sometimes a free cottage, but their hours of work were much longer, and included Sunday attendance on the stock. Harvest pay varied greatly.[2]

Women who worked in the fields were paid, for somewhat shorter hours than the men, from 8d. or 9d. to 1s. 2d. a day.

Some labourers' budgets were collected in the counties mentioned above which show that a labourer with five children spent 10s. 11½d.—wages, 11s.; in Herts, with two

[1] *Church Reformer*, June, 1893.

[2] Mr. W. C. Little, one of the Commissioners, stated that horsemen and cowmen worked 12½ hours a day in summer and 11¾ hours in winter.

children, 13s.—wages, 13s. and cottage; in East Wilts, with six children, 13s. 8½d.—wages, 13s. 6d. Another in East Wilts with seven children, 11s. 5½d.—wages, 10s. In Warwickshire, with eight children, 15s.—wages 15s. In Norfolk, with two children, 12s. 3d.—wages, 12s. 6d.

It is significant that out of four of these six budgets no item appears for meat, and in three no item appears for milk, though there were families of six, seven, and eight children. No item appears in any of the budgets for clothing or boots, and when asked how these were bought, the reply was they "had to do with something less to eat" when purchased. When questioned how they reconciled an expenditure of 11s. 5½d. with an income of 10s., or 13s. 8½d. with an income of 13s. 6d., the ready reply came that "they had to run into debt until the children commenced to work and started to pay off the debt."

Of the two "independent men" in most parishes, the parson and the publican, it appears that of the two the publican showed himself the friendlier, though in one or two villages he dared not allow the Van lecturer to hold a meeting on his premises for fear of being turned out by his landlord. Mr. George Edwards gave evidence at a meeting held in London in 1893 that publicans had told him that they had received notice from their landlords to prohibit Union meetings held in public houses. It was natural, then, that the labourers were looking forward to the use of schoolrooms, which they understood would be granted under the promised Parish Councils Act.

During the wet months of November and December many of the meetings of the League had to be held in chapels, barns, cartsheds, blacksmiths' shops, inns, or cottages.

The parson was generally regarded as one possessing the same political prejudices as the landowner and farmer. It was as politician rather than priest that he was regarded with hostility. In the words of one report:—[1]

"There is very little hostility to the parson as clergyman; but the parson as the nominee of the squire, the friend of the landlord class, the supporter of 'law and order' on the magis-

[1] *Among the Suffolk Labourers.*

terial bench, and the autocratic manager of the school and other local institutions, is denounced among the labourers with an invective which is almost Elizabethan in its freedom and intensity. . . . Where one man owns the land and is at the same time the patron of the living, the whole government of the village, civil and ecclesiastical, is in his hands."

The Reverend Arnold D. Taylor, rector of a parish in South Devonshire, discussed in an outspoken article on "Hodge and his Parson" in the *Nineteenth Century* for March, 1892, the relationship between the labourer and the clergyman. He tells us that wages in Devon were less than 10s. per week. He denies that the way to the labourer's heart is through his stomach. "The way to his heart," he says, "is through his sense of justice." Also that there is a great feeling of dislike to the parson in some country places, and he tells us why.

"In a great number, I should say in the vast majority, of country parishes, the squire, the parson, and the large farmers form a 'ring,' which controls all parochial affairs, so that no outsider has a chance even of knowing what goes on, much less of exerting any real influence on the management of those affairs. This 'ring' practically *is* the vestry. Whoever heard of labourers coming to the vestry meeting, and expressing their view of affairs? If they did come what would be the good? Who would listen to them? And the parson is *ex-officio* chairman of the vestry. He is the leader in Hodge's eye of this exclusive 'ring,' and perhaps Hodge thinks he is mainly responsible for its existence. Hodge may be unjust in this. But who can wonder at his suspicion when he never sees the parson insisting on having the labourers' side heard, or arranging the vestry meeting so that they can attend. . . . Then again, does not Hodge remember the use made in school and Confirmation class of the Church Catechism? Is not that generally used to enforce on him that it is his duty to remain in the position in which he was born, and to look up to and obey the parson and the squire and everyone in the place who is better off than himself? Yes, he remembers well enough. I believe that that teaching is a gross perversion of the words of the Catechism. The men who drew up the Catechism meant 'shall' and not 'has,' when they wrote 'that state of life into which it *shall* please God to call me;' they meant 'betters' when they wrote 'betters,' and not 'those who are better off than myself.'"

Evidently the vestry had not altered since Canon Girdlestone's time.

An illiterate letter, which throws an extraordinary light on the resentment evoked by parsons who preach contentment, was written in pencil and wrapped round a stone for safety and found on the platform of the Wiltshire Red Van at Durnford. On the outside of the envelope were the words: "Please look inside." This was the letter:—

"Our parson preached yesterday of We Labourers Being Dissatisfied and Discontented With our Wages, murmuring of it he said We Labouring men ought to Be Satisfied With What we got. Be satisfied. We Wish You to Publish it Plese." [1]

They *got* 10*s.* a week at Durnford!

[1] *Church Reformer, August* 1893.

II—A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

1894.

The Local Government Act of 1894 has often been styled the Rural Magna Charta. In support of it Gladstone made his last speech in the House of Commons. It was hoped by many that by the creation of Parish and Rural District Councils, the agricultural labourer, so long left out in the cold from the management of his own parochial affairs, would be able to secure allotments easily, would administer non-ecclesiastical charities, acquire village greens and institutes, and above all a roof over his head which he could call his own by a less cumbrous adoption of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890.

So far, the only cottages built under this Act by the rural sanitary authorities were eight cottages built at Ixworth in Suffolk. This was done in 1893. It was the result of labourers forming themselves into the Ixworth Agricultural Labourers' Association, with the help of the liberal-minded vicar, the Revd. F. D. Perrott, who instituted a Housing Enquiry. There is no doubt about the need of new cottages, for Ixworth was a rural slum, and a rural slum is generally worse than a town slum, if this be possible.

In a row of houses with forty-four inhabitants there were only three closets. Water came into both bedrooms in some of the cottages, and a bed quilt was seen covered with holes made by the rats. In one cottage, when it rained heavily the water ran through the back kitchen into the sitting-room and formed a pool in the centre. Dr. Thresh, of the Chelmsford and Malden Unions, who was called in as an expert, condemned the condition of the cottages. The Enquiry was held in 1890. Overwhelming evidence was adduced and the Council were ready to issue their certificate,

when the Guardians took fright at having to spread the rate over the whole of their district instead of limiting the rate to the place immediately benefited. So the building of the cottages was delayed for another three years, when Ixworth, in spite of the powers given to Rural District Councillors, with the parishes of Penshurst, Bradwell, Bratoon, Linton, Malpas, were the only parishes for many years which succeeded in putting into operation the Housing of the Working Classes Act for rural districts.

The creation of County Councils in 1888 brought little grist to the labourer's mill. It is very doubtful if a single labourer had ever sat on a County Council; but it was thought that when Parish Councils were created a large number of these Councils would be dominated by labourers. There would be no loss of labour-time, as meetings would be held in the evening, and so it would be possible for almost any man to attend. County Councils had for long been considered the preserve of the landed aristocracy and large farmers. The lesser fry, the farmer with a moderate sized holding, the shopkeeper and the builder might become Rural District Councillors, but surely the Parish Council would be captured by the labourer? Now would be their opportunity to get land for allotments. They had long resented having to pay a rent for their allotments double the price that the large farmer paid for his land on the other side of the hedge. No longer would they put up with inferior land at some distance from their own homes. Now they had an Act of Parliament which would entitle each man to at least an acre; and if they could not secure the land they wanted voluntarily, they could insist upon the County Council obtaining it by compulsion.

So many thought; but this is not what actually happened. What actually happened was when farmers, vicars, and others resented the labourers sitting upon Parish Councils, labourers were soon made aware of the undesirability of managing their own affairs.

Farmers were in no mood in 1894, when wheat dropped to the lowest price in the history of English agriculture, to tolerate social as well as economic extinction. By 1894

the Labourers' Unions had almost ceased to exist, and the labourer had nothing at his back and nobody to stand by him, if farmers chose to serve him with a notice to quit his cottage or to leave his employment.

In the first year, in the full flush of testing the value of the new power put into their hands, many farm workers did seek to capture the Parish Councils and some of them succeeded. We learn from the *Daily Chronicle*, March 9, 1895, that in the village of Alderminster, Warwickshire,

"a Union labourer has received notice to quit his cottage in March. No reason is given for noticing the labourer to leave, and the only reason that can be imagined is that the labourer is secretary of the branch of the Union, and that he not only stood as a candidate for the Parish Council, but being defeated by the show of hands insisted, in spite of the squire, who is sole landowner, and the vicar, in demanding a poll . . . the labourer has been a householder under the squire for upwards of twenty years and in a month's time, in the ordinary course, he will be driven like an outlaw from his native parish, apparently for no other reason than exercising the rights of citizenship."

It is interesting to note that in another Warwickshire village, Barford, where Joseph Arch lived, though he apparently now took no active part in the life of the place, the secretary of the Warwickshire Labourers' Union succeeded in being elected as a member of the Parish Council.

It is very difficult to collect much evidence of the Parish Councils where labourers were successful in capturing seats. In Warwickshire, however, where the Warwickshire Agricultural Labourers' Union was still in existence the labourers managed to give a good account of themselves. One Parish Council, that of Tysoe, took the Glebe Farm in 1895, and let it as small holdings.

In the twenty-four parishes with branches of the Union where Parish Councils had been established, 91 labourers were returned out of a total of 140 councillors elected. Of the 91 labourers' candidates elected, 54 were farm workers, the rest being artisans or tradesmen adopted and run by the local branches of the Union.

In three parishes in South Warwickshire, Whichford, Ilmington, and Stretton-on-Fosse, where there were branches

of the Union, the labourers secured every seat on the Parish Councils. Only two purely agricultural labourers succeeded in getting on to Rural District Councils in Warwickshire. These were both active members of the Union, and their names were John Mansfield, of Moreton Morell, and Jarvis, of Warmington. Mr. George Edwards, Secretary of the Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labour Union, and who became the most prominent leader of farm workers since Arch's eclipse was elected *with his wife* to the Erpingham Rural District Council in Norfolk.

The 1894 Election at Horsford, St. Faith's Union, Norfolk, (which became a storm centre of the revived National Agricultural Labourers' Union) was fought with a good deal of feeling and resulted in the return of three farm labourers. This Council managed to do some good work. It hired 8 acres of land for allotments; obtained a County Council Enquiry into the condition of cottages and got some of the worst evils remedied. Its most striking success was that of preventing 200 acres of heathland being monopolised by the squire and the neighbouring landowners.

Democratic successes such as that at St. Faith's were won only, as a rule, in open villages, especially where the breath of freedom blew unchecked across heathland; and where squatters and small holders had some foothold upon the earth. Where branches of trade unions still existed in 1894 or where parishes lay close to mining or industrial areas, the man who worked with his hands stood a chance of being elected to Parish Councils. But in most villages the labourer soon found that it did not pay—at any rate the labourer with a wife and family to support! Here and there, in "model" villages, there was a show of democracy. The landowner and the vicar, and the landowner's coachman, the landowner's gamekeeper, his head-gardener, and his butler would sit, though of separate classes, as one happy family party, along with the blacksmith who shod the landowner's carriage horses, and the saddler who supplied the harness. But reforms, as might be imagined under these circumstances, had to be warily suggested by any one but the chairman.

I have heard Earl Selborne say that he, as a Conservative, found it very difficult to get reforms passed by parish councillors, who might be Radical in politics, but as owners of small cottage property were distinctly unprogressive. This is probably true, and there is very little to choose between the Conservative and the Radical, who are both owners of property, however small that property might be, when it comes to an extra penny upon the rates.

To do the landowners justice, although I have given instances of autocratic ruling by the heads of historic families who have been trained from childhood to consider that they have a kind of divine right to rule over the territory which is theirs by inheritance, when the Parish Council Act was passed it was not the squire who acted the part of village tyrant, so much as the farmer, and his class. As the squire and big landowner receded from the field of parochial government and became but economic factors in the background of rural life, the farming class, who lacked the occasional large-handed benevolence and refinement of those who had dominated the vestry meetings, became the dictators.

The Rural Magna Charta of 1894, though it had made a breach in the wall of privilege, had not driven the captains of industry from their fort. On the contrary, political emancipation having gone ahead of economic emancipation, the farmers and the petty bourgeoisie took possession of the Parish and the Rural District Councils with all the *éclat* of a democratic flourish of trumpets. Government by a class, instead of being abolished became firmly entrenched, and the petty tyranny exercised was perhaps more intense than under the old régime. The historical parallel might be sought in the villages of France after the Revolution.

Labourers welcomed the Parish Councils, because these inspired them with the hope that a lever had been put into their hands which would be able to raise for immediate solution not only the question of cottages and allotments, but also of the parish award of Charity Lands and the administration of non-ecclesiastical charities.

For many years they had been suspicious as to the extent

and right use of these Charity Lands and of the income derived therefrom. One of the privileges of a Parish Council was that of inspecting the Parish Chest which was kept by the incumbent. This was done, for instance, at Barford, on the instigation of the labourer, William Ivens, with excellent results. But at Angmering, a large Sussex village close to Worthing, an act of vandalism was performed, not by "the people," but by the middle and upper classes who monopolised the Parish Council. Fearing, apparently, that the contents of the Parish Chest would disclose unpleasant facts concerning the distribution of land dating from the last Enclosure, the most influential member of the Parish Council proposed that the contents of the Parish Chest should be burned! A subservient chairman supported the proposition, and the contents of the solid oak chest, with its three massive locks and the ancient records, quaint documents of priceless value to the parish, were ruthlessly destroyed.

There were Parish Councils, however, which managed to recover some of the "lost" land through examining the Enclosure Awards, Tithe Awards, and list of charities. A useful quarry at Askern (West Riding of Yorkshire), which had been awarded to the parish years ago and quietly usurped by a landowner, is an instance of recovered property. A Derbyshire Parish Council at Shirland compelled a landowner to give up a strip of land by the highroad which he had annexed. In Berkshire, the Hurley Parish Council discovered the lord of the manor had been allowing people to enclose bits of common land on condition they paid him a small quit rent. This was stopped. At Long Preston (West Riding of Yorkshire) the lord of the manor transferred the village greens to the Parish Council free of charge, and at Thundersley, Essex, the same was done with regard to a large common.

The Parish Council of St. Bride's Major (Glamorgan) successfully fought the Earl of Dunraver, who had tried to make a big encroachment.

Parishes with a population of less than 300 which had to be content with an annual Parish Meeting instead of a

Parish Council, unfortunately did nothing at all until the passing of the Small Holdings and Allotment Act of 1907, and there are over 5,000 of these parishes in England and Wales. This fact points conclusively to small rural communities being overawed by those who possessed or occupied the land, and probably in such parishes the majority of the labourers live in farm-tied cottages.

The Parish Councils Act undoubtedly reduced the authority of the squire and the parson in parochial affairs. The farmer class, however, almost everywhere captured and controlled the Rural District Council, which is the real executive body in rural districts. The Rural District Councils are largely the Guardians of the Poor. They decide whether cottages are to be built or not; they control the highways; they are the sanitary authority, and they are the executive body with regard to rights of way, wayside wastes, commons, and water supply. The Parish Council may not spend beyond the amount of a threepenny rate, without the consent of the Parish Meeting, but with its consent the limit is extended to the princely rate of 6d. in the pound.

The County Council in 1894, and for a great number of years to follow, was almost as out of reach of the agricultural labourer as the House of Lords. Ever since the County Council was instituted it was regarded as the preserve of the land-owning class with a sprinkling of large farmers, land agents, and successful business men. Many County Councillors are still returned unopposed; a selection of suitable candidates being arranged at the principal club or hotel of the county capital.

I once assisted a carpenter to contest a County Council seat in Suffolk; but that was not until a year or two before the Great War, and even then the good people of Suffolk were so amazed that one of their own class should attack a county seat that nothing would convince them that a County Councillor did not receive a salary of £200 a year!

It was almost as difficult for a labourer to sit on a Rural District Council, for it meant losing a day's work at least once a month, and either a very long walk, or else the cost

of a conveyance; and the loss of a day's work would in many cases mean the loss of regular employment.

The most reactionary administrative body was, and is still, the Rural District Council, and unfortunately, it is *the* body which was, and still is, largely responsible for the building of cottages, the reform most needed in rural England. Unfortunately too, for the nation and for the labouring classes in particular, gentlemen sit on this body who are either interested in cottage property as builders, or as the landlords of farm-tied cottages, and a Rural District Council could nearly always be depended upon to veto a Parish Council resolution that the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890 should be put into force.

I remember taking part in an election as a candidate for a Parish Council in 1897. No labourer had sat on this Parish Council since its establishment in 1894, and though not an agricultural labourer myself, I was asked by labourers to fight their battles for them, especially with a view to winning for the parish some very much-needed cottages. One ruling family of farmers, who owned most of the farms as well as the tied cottages, many of which were defective in sanitation and in water supply, had hitherto controlled the Parish Council. So effective was the control of this family over the parish that not only did it possess the power to say who should or should not work in the parish as far as agricultural land was concerned, but who should live on that land. As it also controlled the small waterworks, the mill, the butcher's shop, and the bakehouse, it amounted to most of the parishioners having to depend upon the goodwill of this ruling family for work, cottages, water, meat and bread!

After a fierce contest I managed to get elected with a progressive doctor who had acted as chairman. The patriarch who supplied the brains for this family of farmers was vice-chairman of the Rural District Council, and at the first meeting of the Parish Council the sons and nephews who were elected proposed that the patriarch should be chairman in place of the doctor. Thereupon the doctor left the Council, never to return to it; and I was left facing

my foes alone. The exit of the doctor brought about an embarrassing silence. After a pause some one proposed that the son of the patriarch should be sent round for his father to ask him to take the chair. Again we sat in silence, until the son returned with the announcement that "Dad says he has taken off his boots." Another embarrassing silence, broken, I am afraid, by a chuckle from me. "Go back and tell him it's very purtickler," said one of the bolder members of the ruling family. Again the son departed, and eventually brought back the patriarch who took the chair with the refreshing statement that "he had never read the Parish Councils Act, and never meant to."

At the second meeting I proposed that we should request the Rural District Council to put into operation the Housing of the Working Classes Act. No one argued against it, and it was passed, though I noticed a significant sly twinkle in the patriarch's eye. When my resolution was read before the Rural District Council the patriarch coolly proposed that it should lie on the table. And it has been lying there, or in the archives of that Rural District Council, ever since that day!

In spite of the publicity given to the deplorable condition of cottage property in nearly every county visited by the Red Vans, little was done to build new cottages save by the best of the landowners. These Red Van Reports give us lurid glimpses into the kind of homes occupied by labourers and their families.

A labourer graphically describes the cottage he lived in in a Suffolk village, by the remark, "You may shut the doors and windows close enough, but you can't keep the cat out." The rich sporting landowner, who cared as little for cottage rents as he did for farm rents, was a bad example of the English landowner.[1]

"We met a labourer," writes a lecturer of the Red Van, "pulling down a cottage in which he formerly lived for years. According to his account he had been evicted and the ground cleared for the better preservation of game on the adjoining land, and he had also been sacked by the farmer for joining the Union and

[1] *Amongst the Agricultural Labourers*, 1891.

urging the men to demand a rise of wages. Having no work, he applied to the landlord's agent, who set him to work to pull down his own cottage and two others adjoining." [1]

"As long as there are squires," writes Mr. P. Anderson Graham, in his *Rural Exodus*, "it is desirable that they should be encouraged to shoot. The keenest sporting landlord, when out with his gun does far more than make a bag. It is his surest way of acquiring an accurate and detailed knowledge of his property. On the stubble or among the roots in the partridge season, it becomes second nature to him to note the result of the tillage of his various tenants. Let him be bogged in pursuit of snipe or stranded in some miry field, and he will not easily forget where the drains should be."

This is a curious manner of picking up one's education as a landowner. In the instance quoted above the keen sporting landlord, in acquiring a detailed knowledge of his property when out with his gun, must have considered that there were a superfluous number of cottages upon his estate.

"In North Herefordshire," we learn, "some landlords take a special interest in having their cottages kept in good order and the sanitary inspector's influence is occasionally apparent. Still many dwellings are described as 'not fit for a pig to live in' and one labourer complained that he had to keep a bucket on his bed during wet nights to catch the rain coming through the roof. During the existence of the N.A.L.U., Government pressure was brought to compel several large landlords to make very substantial improvements in their cottage property. But it appears that immediately the active organisers of that Union had left the district the repairs in hand were discontinued and have never been touched again to this day." [2]

"As a general rule, the cottages of Berkshire were found to be shockingly bad, and frequently the health of the inmates is endangered by the proximity of open drains and stagnant sewage.[3]

"It is in Wiltshire and Norfolk that the evil of tied cottages is most severely felt: in the former county returns have been obtained from forty-five parishes, showing 1,660 tied cottages out of a total of 2,958; and in some of the villages every cottage is under the control of the farmer or farmers for whom the men

[1] *Amongst the Agricultural Labourers*, 1891.
[2] *Ibid.*, 1892. [3] *Ibid.*

work. . . . Unfortunately it cannot be said that things are often much better when the landlord retains the cottages under his control. If the landlord is neglectful the cottages fall into decay, and, no new ones being built, the labourers and their families dwell in ruins, fit only for bats and owls, till their collapse drives their tenants out of the village." [1]

One of the worst reports comes from Wiltshire.

"The cottages in this village (Edington, near Westbury)," reports the lecturer, "are in the most awful state of dilapidation that it is possible to conceive. They are to be seen in every stage of ruin—from the cottage that is barely tenable to the heap of rubbish that marks the spot where a cottage formerly stood. One I inspected consisted of four rooms, two up and two down, with what had been formerly a small brewhouse and wash-house attached. It adjoined another which was long past being tenable, and was already a dangerous ruin. To describe the occupied house is almost impossible. The front room downstairs, which was the best, measured 15 ft. 8 in. by 8 ft. 2½ in., the height being 5 ft. 10 in. It was lighted by a window which the occupier had put in at her own expense; the old window had fallen out through decay, and the landlord refused to replace it. It was the only room where cooking could be done or meals taken, but it had no cupboard. A crazy staircase, that threatened to give way at every step, led to the room above. This was the same in length and breadth, but it had an average height of 5 ft. 8 in. only. The roof was in holes, and the ceiling, which was cracked and blistered to an almost inconceivable extent, had been falling bit by bit for years. No repairs had been done to this or any other room by the landlord for years. The window is 18 in. square, but the walls are so built that only a small ray of light can enter. The back bedroom beggars description. Half one side of the room has literally fallen out into the garden, and has been in this condition for years. Old skirts and rags are hung over great holes to keep out wind and rain. But in spite of every precaution, the place in bad weather and in winter is a swamp. The ceiling which is falling day by day slopes in such a way that there is only a small space in which a man of average height can stand upright. The 'room' below this is no better than a yard, and is open to the weather on two sides. Of the brewhouse only the walls remain; the door and the roof have rotted away. The whole building will probably be blown down by the first rough wind.

"Another house which the lecturer visited consisted of three rooms. Its walls were bulging out, and had great fissures

[1] *Amongst the Agricultural Labourers*, 1892.

threatening total collapse. The ground-floor room had been partitioned into two, with the result that both halves were in a state of semi-darkness, even when the sun was shining brightly and the cottage door wide open. The front room was a stifling box in which you might touch both walls with extended arms. At the time of his visit the occupier (a woman) and a neighbour were themselves whitewashing the place. The bedrooms were miniature lofts, unpapered, in a crumbling condition, separated by a warped and cracked door, which for years had ceased to answer its original purpose. One window had lost all its panes and was boarded up. The ground-floor window was a curiosity. As the panes had fallen out the occupier had put in glass from one or two picture frames, but the last collapse having exhausted the available glass, a family Bible had been pushed against the sash to keep the wind out. The woman who lives in this hovel with her boy of nine years (who helps to support the 'home') gave me a heartrending account of her miseries during her first confinement in one of these wretched bedrooms. It was in the depth of winter and—ladies of England, in your sheltered homes, think of it!—the snow lay upon the quilt on her bed, under which shivered mother and new-born babe. The melted snow produced a flood upon the floor, and found its way through the rotten floor and ceiling. Scarcely a ray of light came into the room, and at night the place was in utter darkness, for the wind blew through great holes in the roof in such a way that a candle or lamp was out of the question. On a rough night the cottage shakes so much that the occupant is obliged sometimes to leave the house for fear of its falling. Is it surprising that the woman since the experiences of that awful lying-in, has spent much of her time in the hospital, and is now quite unable to do any but very light work? She receives 2s. 6d. from the parish and her son earns 5s. a week, and out of this the owner of the hovel takes 1s. a week for rent. The cottage of a small holder is nearly as bad. The whole of the top windows have been blown out, and their place is taken by sacks.

"The owner of all these cottages is Simon Watson-Taylor, Esquire, D.L., J.P., lord of the manor, lay impropriator, and principal landowner of this and neighbouring villages. At Earlstoke he has a noble mansion, commanding from its elevated position, beautiful views, surrounded by a well-timbered park in which deer roam by lake and cascade."[1]

"Warwick (Ratley). In several instances it is impossible, on a wet night, to sleep in some of the bedrooms, and in the case of one cottage, by standing on a mound close to the house, you may look through the roof into the bedrooms. The landlord of some

[1] *Amongst the Agricultural Labourers*, 1894.

of these cottages is, however, very solicitous about the morals, if not about the health, of the inmates. If any tenant's daughter 'gets into trouble,' the parents must immediately drive the unfortunate girl from home, otherwise the whole family is evicted." [1]

"The cottages . . . and the water supply of their inhabitants are in many of the villages deplorably bad, and in spite of the depopulation which has been going on sometimes the former are quite inadequate to the needs of the labourers. At Navestock, in Ongar union (Essex), the lecturer found ten small cottages in a row, inhabited on the average by ten persons each. Some cottages at Maplestead and Pebmarsh he describes as hovels. . . . The borough of Saffron Walden deserves reference; in that sanctuary of the Society of Friends, where a publican is regarded as almost an outcast, the labourers' cottages are all in one quarter—a horrible kind of labourers' ghetto, of which Castle Street is the centre. The houses are small, inconvenient, without proper air space, and in insanitary condition. Some few have a few square yards of drying ground." [2]

The economic grounds on which Rural District Councils based their arguments against building cottages were that it would entail a charge upon the rates. They showed with some reason that you could not compete with cottages let at the uneconomic rent of 1s. 6d. or 2s. a week. That was perfectly true of a great many districts, though it never seemed to have occurred to the farmers who sat on District Councils that if they paid their labourers a shilling or two more per week the men would be able to pay the economic rent which in some parishes amounted to only 3s. 6d. per week.

Cottages at this time were built for about £200 each, and were let at Bradwell and Bratton for 3s. 6d. per week, at Penshurst for 4s. 9d. per week. The Parish Council could appeal to the County Council in the event of the Rural District Council refusing to build, and this was done at Penshurst at the instigation of Miss Jane Escombe. But there is no doubt that low wages, besides the uneconomic farm-tied cottages, were the deterrent factors, and it seemed to many reformers that cottages would never be built in rural districts until agricultural labourers received a living minimum wage.

[1] *Amongst the Agricultural Labourers*, 1894. [2] *Ibid.*

Yet many cottages could have been built in semi-suburban districts and in rural areas adjoining industrial communities where wages were higher than in the depths of the country, and the tenants would readily have paid the economic rent of 4s. or 5s. a week. But they were not built, save in extremely small numbers, and the succeeding Housing Act of 1909, instead of creating a great many more cottages in the country, had the effect of closing down far more cottages than it built.

I do not wish to convey the idea that Parish Councils did no useful work in improving the conditions of village life for the labourer. That they did many things I shall show; but there is no doubt that labourers were disillusioned over the executive powers of Parish Councils, and through the process of continual victimisation lost any enthusiasm they had in 1894, and let those who had been in the habit of governing them continue to do so. I know a village in Sussex where at this time six farm labourers managed to get elected, and every one of these six labourers had eventually to seek his living outside the parish.

To briefly record some of the work done by Parish Councils between 1894 and 1907 besides getting the cottages built in the villages I have mentioned, and recovering parish land, Parish Halls or Rooms were built at Charing (Kent), Boarhunt (Hants), Compton (Hants), Hessle (Yorks), Dysarth (Flintshire), Hawkehurst (Kent), Trefriew (Carnarvonshire), Underskiddaw (Cumberland), Bovey Tracey (Devonshire), South Stoke (Oxfordshire), Gunthorpe (Nottinghamshire), Cheddar (Somersetshire).

Bathing places were established at Betchworth (Surrey), Alveston (Warwick), Snitterfield (Warwick), Ibstock (Leicester), Snodland (Kent), Blaby (Leicestershire), Campden (Gloucestershire).

Libraries and Reading Rooms were opened in several parishes, the best known of which is at Middle Claydon, which was established by the late Sir Edmund Verney, and where I learn from Sir Harry Verney, fiction seems to be the only kind of literature for which there is a constant demand.

Curious political prejudices were discovered to rule in

some of these parishes. In one Parish Reading Room in Surrey no Liberal newspaper was allowed, and in a Sussex parish the clergyman gave his copy of *The Times* but refused to let the *Daily News* be presented on the ground that it was a "party organ."

Many foot-bridges over streams have been erected by Parish Councils, thus incontestably establishing for ever the right of way. A number of Recreation Grounds have been secured such as at Titchfield (Hants), Nacton (Suffolk), Aldenham (Herts), Westbury (Wilts), Mayfield (Staffs), Roade (Northants), Calverton (Notts), Bramcote (Notts), Harrow Weald (Middlesex), Twyford (Berks), Aston Tirrold (Berks), Wymondham (Norfolk), Clifton (Lancs), Naseby (Northants), Barrowden (Rutland), Norton-under-Hamdon (Somerset), Barford (Warwickshire), Northolt (Middlesex), Aberffraw (Anglesey), Wittington (Worcestershire), Chigwell (Essex), Pelsall (Staffs), Chulmleigh (Devon), Horndon-on-the-Hill (Essex), Forest Row (East Sussex), Horsepath (Oxfordshire), Wattisfield (West Suffolk), Ropley (Hants), Burwell (Cambridgeshire), Willingham (Cambridgeshire), Cuddesdon (Oxfordshire), Winterslow (Wilts), Caterham (Surrey), Potton (Bedfordshire), Tiverton (Somerset), Willingham (Cambridgeshire), South Normanton (Derbyshire), Combe Martin (Devon), Aldenham (Herts), Frensham (Surrey).

Villagers who had strongly resented the closing of ancient rights of way by landowners, and who had hitherto taken the law into their own hands at the risk of heavy fines and imprisonment, now found in the Parish Council a legal weapon forged for their using. Obstructions which had long eaten like sores into village life were either removed by the writing of a polite letter, or were beaten down by villagers who felt that at last they had the law on their side. Sometimes the bolder spirits were made to suffer for their zeal, for a stubborn landowner could still put up a good fight and obtain damages, both moral and material, in spite of the fact that obstruction had been proved.

A friend of mine wrote an article at this time headed "Thou shalt not Steal" directed against a landowner who

had closed a public footpath. An action was brought by the landowner against the journalist, and although it was admitted that a public footpath had been wrongfully closed, the Judge declared that the landowner's *character* had suffered by the publication of this article, which cost my friend the sum of £500 !

Parish Councils had often but little assistance from Rural District Councils in re-opening rights of way, and a considerable amount of work was given to that excellent body, the Commons Preservation Society, in the early years of the working of the Parish Councils Act. Boldness, however, sometimes had its own reward. When Sir Weetman Pearson (now Viscount Cowdray) purchased the Cowdray estate one of his first acts was to padlock the iron gates which opened on to the ancient right of way across the grounds of Cowdray Castle. Thereupon the Chairman of the Midhurst Parish Council took the village blacksmith with him, filed through the chain, and in full view of the public walked down the ancient right of way, thus reclaiming the right of way forever.

Common pasture and grazing grounds were provided at Soulbury (Bucks), and at Hasland (Derbyshire). In Yorkshire pasture for the poor man's cow, and the cottager's goose or donkey were provided at Ashton-cum-Aughton, which rented 8 acres ; at Kilham, which rented 21 acres, and at Beeford, which rented 48 acres.

It was, though, in the acquisition of allotments that Parish Councils achieved the greatest success. From 1894 up to 1907 (when the new Small Holding and Allotment Act was passed) 40,000 working men were holding land directly from their Parish Councils. Under the 1894 Act if land was hired compulsorily one tenant could not hold more than 4 acres of pasture, or 1 acre of arable and 3 acres of pasture. By voluntary arrangement with acquiescent landowners, however, there was no limit to the acreage a Parish Council might lease.

Compulsory powers had often to be put into force, as they were at the following places :—Asfordby (Leicestershire), Ashby (Lincolnshire), Beaghall (Yorkshire), Dunsford

(Devon), East Rusten (Norfolk), Fosdyke (Lincolnshire), Gamlingay (Cambs), Garthorpe (Lincolnshire), Goxhill (Lincolnshire), Holt (Dorset), Kexby (Lincolnshire), Llandyfriog (Cardiganshire), Potter Heigham (Norfolk), Preston (Dorset), Tarvin (Cheshire), Tydd St. Mary (Lincolnshire), West Shutford (Oxfordshire).[1]

The most interesting allotment settlements have been those carried out by the Parish Councils at Belbroughton (Worcestershire) and Moulton (Lincolnshire). Close to Belbroughton is Catshill, and it was at Catshill where some attempt was made, and certainly with a modicum of success, to carry out the provisions of the Small Holdings Act of 1892, which proved to be an abortive attempt to establish peasant proprietorship in England as a permanent feature of land settlement. The Worcester County Council was the first to apply the powers provided by this Act, and in 1892 it agreed to buy at Catshill the farm of 147 acres at £33 an acre.

In the usual unthinking, official way 2,000 notices were issued in a hole and corner manner, and these received but one application in answer. Afterwards, when a meeting was held at Catshill and the Act was explained to those present, the Council satisfied itself that a number of people desiring small holdings were unable to find the necessary deposit of 20 per cent., and so agreed to accept a certain number of men as tenants besides those willing to purchase.

A great number of the villagers in this district were nail-makers, who were out of work through the introduction of machinery in the manufacture of hobnails. It did not seem to occur to well-meaning bureaucrats that there was some irony in offering to sell land to penniless men. At Belbroughton, where dire poverty drove many to poach, and where the poor rates went up by leaps and bounds, the penniless men seized the opportunity through their Parish Council to apply their muscles to the labour-starved acres that surrounded them. In 1895 the Parish Council took a field of 18 acres and accommodated thirty nailers. The next year 16 acres were added; the year

[1] Vide *Parish Councils and Village Life*, The Fabian Society.

after 109 acres; and in 1903 a further 34 acres. These 177 acres enabled 112 men to obtain a livelihood as market gardeners. No less than twenty-six horses were employed in ploughing, carting, and carrying the produce to Birmingham and bringing back manure for the land. All this was done in spite of the continued opposition of the chief landowner, and to-day (1919), I believe the Parish Council of Belbroughton controls no less than 500 acres.

The working men of Belbroughton did certainly "grow their own poor rate" in a manner which would have amazed John Stuart Mill, had he lived to see how they lifted themselves from pauperism to comparative independence. Judging by the statistics of pauperism in the county of Oxfordshire, which was one of the lowest paid counties in England, and one of the highest in the return for allotments, Mill's contention might have seemed to hold good; but allotments were equally as popular in Norfolk, and though wages were low in that county they were not lower than some other eastern and southern counties and one cannot say that the men of Norfolk have ever been backward in the fight for higher wages or shown a spirit of subservience. Nor was meekness characteristic of the fenland districts where wages were a little higher and allotments as numerous as in any other district in England.

To point to the absence of what is technically known as allotments in the northern counties where wages were highest, is no argument in support of Mill's theory; for in the north cow-pasturage for the hind or a potato patch in the ploughed field was quite a common allowance as a supplement to wages. Moreover town workmen who enjoy much higher wages than agricultural workers, have always shown a greater desire for allotments than the agricultural labourer, who finds no recreation in repeating after tea what he has been doing all day long.

Where men are regularly employed it is the bent back of the woman who has to bear the burden of allotment tillage, especially at planting and harvesting, when the man's services are required in his master's fields. Socially, rather than economically, there is much to be said against allot-

ments for agricultural labourers, though there is no doubt that the allotment is a standby in a time of stress such as lock-outs or strikes, as the miners found in the strike of 1893.

If a man turns himself into a drudge by too diligent an application to the land that is not the fault of the allotment, but is due to the man making a wrongful use of his leisure, losing a sense of proportion, and taking up too much time on the allotment where others may take up too much time in public houses. No allotment, however, ever makes up for the lack of a cottage garden of equal size. It is to the casually employed labourer, the piece-worker, such as a hedger and thatcher, and the man who means to make his allotment a stepping stone to a small holding, to whom it is most valuable.

No Allotment Act, not even the Parish Councils Act, which had a stormy passage through the House of Lords, was designed to free labourers from their economic servitude to farmers. Only one or two counties had put into operation the Small Holdings Act of 1892, and the few farms purchased were quite small. In the same year of the passing of this first Small Holdings Act an Allotment Association was formed at Spalding under the energetic leadership of Mr. Richard Winfrey. A field of 33 acres owned by Lord Carrington was let to the members, and at Ladyday, 1895, a farm on good land (Willow Tree Farm) of 217 acres in extent becoming vacant was leased by a syndicate formed by Mr. Winfrey, from Lord Carrington. This syndicate, or association, became known as the Lincolnshire and Norfolk Small Holdings Association, with Mr. (now Sir) Richard Winfrey as its chairman. Its history might be briefly told here.

After extending its area round Willow Tree Farm, thus making a total of 650 acres in this district, it purchased three farms at Swaffham and Whissonsett in Norfolk, on land far inferior to the Spalding land. It leased 1,000 acres at Wingland from the Crown, and eventually became controller of 2,266 acres worked by 290 tenants with a rent roll of £4,890. It is significant that this body of small holders, who were almost all agricultural labourers,

risked their livelihood at a time when wheat was 25s. a quarter. The last return showed that corn crops occupied nearly half the acreage, and the loss from rents had been less than 10s. per £100.

Another development af the Small Holding movement in South Lincolnshire which takes us to a later date might be suitably mentioned here. At Moulton 1,000 acres sparsely grazed and badly cultivated were leased to the Moulton Parish Council by the Crown. This Parish Council consisted almost entirely of working men and the Crown Land Commissioners very wisely spent no less than £8,000 on the equipment of these holdings in the form of cottages and farm buildings. These holdings ranged from allotments of one rood to small farms of 79 acres, though roughly speaking the small holders might be divided into two classes, those with 4 or 5 acres working for employers, and those with 20 acres to 50 acres working entirely for themselves. It is interesting to note here that whilst the rural exodus continued through this decade and the next the population of the rural area of Spalding increased from 10,751 in 1901 to 23,497 in 1911.

In this chapter I have dealt largely with the rising hopes of the rural workers to get a footing on the land and a roof over their heads by means of the Parish Councils Act. Two years afterwards, by 1896, farm workers seem to have been reduced to the lowest depth of despondency during the whole period of agricultural depression. Nearly every vestige of a trade union had died out,[1] and as these died

[1] A letter addressed to me from the Registrar (Sept. 25, 1919) contains the following information :—

" In the case of the Eastern Counties Federation Register No. 639, there appears to have been a Union registered in 1890 under the name of the Eastern Counties Labour Federation, and a statement accompanied the Return for that year to the effect that since the end of 1895 the Eastern Counties Labour Federation ' now stands Nil (as regards membership) and the funds, after paying all dues and demands, are completely exhausted.' "

Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb in their *History of Trade Unionism* (1901) give the number enrolled as 17,000, which, if intended as an index of membership in that year, was apparently inaccurate.

I am also informed by the Registrar that returns ceased to be furnished after 1894 by the London and Counties Labour League (the old Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union) and the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, the trustees of which were then given as Messrs. Arch, Baker, and Lush.

there was little or no organised attempt to capture the Parish Councils. Wheat was down to 26s. a quarter, and there seemed no prospect of getting a rise in wages. If they could not get land and so work out their own salvation there seemed little hope for them. The workhouse loomed larger than ever in their eyes. There was no Old Age Pension, and those beaten in the struggle for existence received the parochial dole of a shilling or two a week with half a stone of flour.

It is a great effort for an agricultural labourer to pen a letter to a local paper, especially to exhibit his poverty, but one Daniel Hull, of Tolleshunt-Knights told his story in 1897 in a letter sent to the Essex County Council. He was eighty-five years of age, of which number of years he had put in eighty at work, and had now to "fall back on one loaf and 2s. a week."

Immediately the picture rises to one's eyes of Richard Jefferies' labourer, John Brown. "If in front of him could be piled up all the work he has done in his life what a huge pyramid it would make; and then if beside him could be placed the product and award to himself, he could hold it in his clenched hand like a nut, so that nobody could see it."[1]

Rural trade unionism was now at its lowest ebb since 1872. The National Agricultural Labourers' Union had practically ceased to exist in every one of its ramifications. But a new union entered the field, and as its history has become a most remarkable one it is interesting to record its early days, however insignificant its doings might have appeared to the nation at that time.

I have said that in the beginning years of the 'nineties the stimulus of trade union organisation amongst agricultural labourers was artificial. It derived from the towns, and the rapidly formed country unions had but a meteoric career.

Now in May 1898 a new urban union came into being

[1] Lord Rothschild's Committee (1898) reported that two-thirds of the people over sixty-five needed "aid." The aged poor, numbering about three-quarters of a million, who needed aid to keep alive, had to wait for another ten years before the Old Age Pensions Act was passed.

called the Workers' Union. It was formed to organise all those workers who did not follow any particular craft or had not been catered for by existing unions. Its ambition was to organise the whole of the unorganised into one big union. Mr. Tom Mann was its president, and Mr. Charles Duncan its secretary—on £2 a week. Though it had its birth amongst bricks and mortar and the grime of soot, its formation fortunately had reached the ears of a skilled agricultural worker living in a midland village called Ellerdine Heath, and he was determined at the outset to organise the farm workers. This was Mr. John Beard. He managed to get eight men to join in his own village and then held a public meeting at Iron Bridge, Salop, which he invited Mr. Charles Duncan to address. Mr. Duncan had been instructed to ride a bicycle because the Union was too poor to afford travelling expenses. The meeting was held, but nobody joined the Union!

Then another effort was made some months later at the same village. This time excitement had been worked up by a born advertising agent, who was then working as a farm labourer. This was Mr. John Simpson, who afterwards became the creator and the secretary of the Planet Friendly Assurance Society. Mr. Simpson cleverly created curiosity through a newspaper controversy in which he was audacious enough to use his own name and address.

The farmers looked upon this act as a piece of sheer impudence, while labourers were aghast at his daring. He not only attacked the conditions of the labourers but also held up to ridicule the private ownership of land. The three men, Mr. John Beard, Mr. Charles Duncan, and Mr. John Simpson, spoke. Farm workers walked to the meeting from miles around. It was a great success, and at the end of it a number of labourers joined the Union.

The next meeting was held at Prees, Salop, and here again the men came in from the farms and hamlets around and made a big village meeting.

The next night the three men went to Market Drayton, Shropshire, which was near Mr. Simpson's home, and one may be assured the ground had been well prepared. Here

a man turned up in a cart who might have been a successor to Arch. He was a bearded vociferous Primitive Methodist, a tower of strength to any union composed of agricultural labourers. He was a Parish Councillor and a Guardian of the Poor, and before a meeting was held at his own village, delightfully called Loggerheads, he would insist on going round the neighbourhood singing at the top of his voice at the doors of the cottages. To give himself free expansion of his chest he took off his coat in addition to rolling up his sleeves. His name was Enoch—at least that was his Christian name, and who would want to know him by any other ?

During the course of the year the Union had enrolled about 2,000 agricultural labourers in the Midlands, and Mr. John Beard having proved himself so capable, was appointed an organiser at the princely salary (irregularly paid) of 12s. a week—the wage of his fellow farm workers. Eventually, Mr. Beard became the President of the Union and a member of the Agricultural Wages Board, for which his knowledge and his tactful negotiating qualities well fitted him.

In those days neither publicans nor parsons gave a very warm welcome to Trade Union organisers. The publicans were often small farmers and as licencees feared the frown of a magisterial bench of landowners. When the parson was sympathetic he had to face the opposition of hostile churchwardens. Mr. Beard tells an amusing incident of a vicar who autocratically gave him permission to hold a meeting in a village schoolroom, in spite of the veto of the other managers, who were farmers. The vicar, in explaining the situation, said although lamps could not be provided by the school, Mr. Beard would be able to get them from the church !

The meeting was held and a branch was started, but the churchwardens prevented the further use of the school by imposing a high rent. The village grocer then came to the rescue of the Union by placing his hayloft at its disposal, and branch meetings were then held under the light of a horn lantern whilst the men sat round on bundles of hay.

Permission to allow the Union the use of a chapel proved to be more embarrassing than the vicar's permission

to use a schoolroom without lamps. The trustees of a certain chapel after much heart-searching decided to let the Union have the use of the chapel, on condition that the meeting followed the lines of a religious service. This Mr. Beard assures us was more than a little difficult for him, "but quite easy for John Simpson, who had been a lay preacher." When the time came, however, the trustees being apprehensive of the devotional capacities of trade union officials delegated one of their own members to take charge of the service. Mr. Simpson preached the sermon on a text based on one of the hymns selected, "Who is our neighbour?" Although it was agreed that the sermon was a good one the audience was evidently puzzled and not a member was enrolled.[1]

"A post card lying on my desk," writes Mr. Beard, "posted to me so long ago as 1900, reminds me of a refusal. This time it was from an Oddfellows' Committee which was our last hope in that village. The first was the National School, next the Wesleyan Chapel, and then the two public houses. The reason was not far to seek. The squire was a National School manager; the leader of the Methodists was head carpenter on the estate; the first public house belonged to the Hall, and the Annual Rent dinners were held there; the second one had as a landlord a man who was a farmer as well; the secretary of the Oddfellows' Committee was a farmer and builder, and the Committee were the squire's gardeners and estate workmen and village tradesmen. This kind of a ring was frequently met with and against it there was little hope."

This ray of hope generated by the Workers' Union which penetrated the Midlands at the end of the nineteenth century, flickered and sank to a mere spark, until the great whirlwind of war which swept over the world fanned it into life again.

[1] *The Workers' Union Record*, August, 1919.

PART SIX

STIRRINGS OF NEW LIFE

1900.

In 1901, Sir Rider Haggard, the Arthur Young of the twentieth century, made his famous tour[1] through the whole of England south of Yorkshire. The picture presented to us is a gloomy one : land going back to grass with the labourer leaving the land is the recurring note in county after county. Arch in 1897 declared that " nothing but boys and old men were left." This is an exaggerated statement, though of the young men who remained the majority were not the brightest specimens of their class. It may largely account for the decline and almost total extinction of trade union organisation in rural England from 1896 to 1906. Corn prices remained low, and although farmers were gradually adapting themselves to the newer conditions, turning their attention to dairying rather than to corn production, the upward tendency in their industry did not begin until about the year 1906.

In the meantime, silently but persistently, the inarticulate agricultural labourer who had no one to speak for him, left the open fields for the crowded cities. It is estimated that the conversion of arable land into grass between 1881 and 1901 threw from 60,000 to 80,000 farm labourers out of work, and this was accentuated later by the increasing use of labour-saving machinery.

" This is certain," wrote Sir Rider Haggard, " for I have noted it several times, some parts of England are becoming almost as lonesome as the Veld of Africa. There ' the highways lie waste,

[1] *Rural England*, by Rider Haggard.

the wayfaring man ceaseth.' The farm labourer is looked down upon, especially by young women of his own class, and consequently he looks down upon himself. He is at the very bottom of the social scale."

Few more poignant stories are told of our empty countryside than that of Mr. W. H. Hudson, in the opening chapter of his book *A Shepherd's Life*. Whilst cycling along the valley of the Ebble, a farm boy standing alone in the middle of a big field raced across the field to the gate which gave on to the road. On being questioned as to what he wanted, the boy replied, "Nothing; *it was just to see you pass.*" And this was eight years later!

Chiefly, Sir Rider Haggard contended, it was a matter of wages. "But," he adds, "it was not solely a question of wages; he (Hodge) and his wife seek the change in the excitement of the streets. Nature has little meaning for most of them and no charm; but they love a gas lamp. Nature, in my experience, only appeals to the truly educated."

That it was largely a question of higher wages, to which I would add, more abundant leisure, is indubitable; but it is not true in my opinion that Nature makes no appeal to those who work under the open sky.

Though often unexpressed—for poets are as rare amongst farm labourers as they are amongst the educated classes—there is a strong, indefinable feeling for Nature in the hearts of those who earn their daily bread in the fields and in the woods.

"Ah," sighingly said a man of my acquaintance who had been brought up at the plough-tail, dreaming out of a dingy city window, "the seagulls will now be following the plough!" The cuckoo's first haunting note signalling the eternal youth of the world, invariably evokes from the uneducated a thrill of pleasure as if it were the opening bar of some well-known melody.

The beauty of the blackthorn throwing its bridal wreath across the hedge when March leans upon April has been often pointed out to me by some toil-smitten labourer, and the glory of the wild cherry, in snowy blossom has, I have noticed, stricken him mute with admiration. The song of the

nightingale under a still starlit night excites in the swain a feeling as intense as the pipings of Pan did in ancient Greece. The hill which has brooded over his village since infancy, pulls at the heart-strings of many a shepherd who has watched the trifolium lace the hillside with crimson and the charlock weave a cloth of gold at its feet.

To the lonely woodman the singing brook becomes a living companion. The rainbow in the sky which links earth to heaven rarely appears without an ejaculation from the man with the hoe. Changes in the sky, the reddening of the west, and the sinister rising of a grey cloud no larger than a man's hand, and the race of the wind is more to the agricultural labourer than the doings of Parliament, or the pronouncements of the Church. Trudging along the lampless lanes he watches with interest the sickle moon harvesting its light. He has worked in too many wet shirts and under too many burning suns to remain indifferent to Nature.

Those who have lived in any intimacy with the labourer know that there were two compelling forces which kept men on the land who might have earned with ease the higher wages and greater freedom of the towns. One was the shackle of debt which kept them in bondage, especially at the time when the children were young and unable to contribute to the family funds ; the other was this love of Nature, not perhaps as understood in the schools, but in the peasant's way, in which was mingled a quiet but strong affection for live creatures both wild and domesticated. Probably the love of his horse is greater in some farm worker than the love of his wife !

In the early years of the twentieth century I was constantly working with a labourer who was one of the most skilled craftsmen of the fields I have ever known. He was very strong as well as skilful. His great fault was his overpowering thirst, and one would have imagined that with his fondness for the bottle he would live where drink was most easily procured ; that is in the crowded street where the tap-room door invited entrance at every hundred yards. He chose, however, to live in a shed in a field by a copse where the nightingales sang in April, situated about two miles

from the nearest public house, which, owing to his violence when "in liquor," he was prohibited from entering.

Rough, uneducated, and drunken in his habits though he was, yet he had a love for Nature akin to the love of a poet. He would tell me that the sunset reminded him of the colours in a brooch he once saw gracing a farmer's wife. With hands torn by bramble, he would, with the light of pleasure in his eyes, bring from the woods in which he trespassed without hesitation "purty leetle" roots of periwinkle which he called when variegated "barnicated winkle," besides cowslips and primroses, which he loved for their pale beauty and knew that my wife loved too. He once asked her to give him a few crocus bulbs because they were "like leetle bits o' sun," to plant round his battered old shed.

Another man, brought up as a ploughboy, possessed a love of the country which was as indestructible, for he chose to remain in a part of Sussex where he once hoed in a field alone for four months without seeing a soul from morning to night; and one of these fields in which he was the sole worker was 650 paces wide. In spite of the fact that his employer was a hard man,—for on one occasion, on a very wet day, finding that my old friend was taking shelter under a hedge he ordered him out to hoe in a field where he had to wade knee-deep in mangold leaves—in spite of such experiences he remained true to his love of the soil and to-day is cultivating a small holding of his own. Being a handy man not only with the hoe and the billhook, but also with the hammer and chisel, he could have found a more profitable job in the towns, but he stayed where he could hear the hum of the bees, which he handled with the tenderness of a woman for a child, and where he could watch the sheep like a string of pearls encircling the shoulder of the Downs.

Lieut-Col. Pedder, in an article[1] vividly descriptive of rural life at this time, mentions this deep love of the labourer for the land.

"'Farm-service' is still subjugation. It yokes and goads and brutalises. Men are still dismissed if their acquaintances do not

[1] *Contemporary Review*, February, 1903.

please their masters. Their wives, though under no legal obligation to do so, must still go out to field labour or 'give offence.' Opposition in politics may involve 'a march,' as they have learnt to call a compulsory flitting. The Parish Council gives the master abundant tests of submission. 'I didn't know as he was agin' her,' said a labourer of fifty-five, telling how he unadvisedly 'held up his hand' for a lady who was a candidate for a seat in the village parliament. 'But didn't he just give it to I aterwards!' 'Still as a slave before his lord' represents the attitude of the farm hand in the presence of his employer. No sheep before her shearers was ever more dumb than the milkers and carters and ploughmen at the village meetings to which their masters may choose to summon them. They are cowed. It is to this that the race have come, whom Froissart described as 'le plus perilleux peuple qui soit au monde, et plus outrageux et orgueilleux.' Pride is dead in their souls.

"Is there no germ of independence within them that may still be fostered and vivified? Parish Councils were intended for this very purpose and Parish Councils have signally failed. As long as the Land is in the hands of a small class straightly banded together for the maintenance of their position and their authority, the condition of the labourers must remain practically one of serfdom. The monopoly of great farmers must be broken up before the dawn of hope can rise upon the English peasant. And great farmers are upheld by the whole Conservative party in England. They play the part of the 'Undertakers' at the election of James I's second Parliament. As a class they 'undertake' that the vote of the villages shall be Conservative. Their power of paralysing anything like freedom of electoral choice in their dependents is a weapon in the hands of a political party. But even if Hope were again to shine upon the peasant, is there anything left within him to which Hope could appeal?

"Yes, deep in the heart of the country labourer there glimmers still a tiny spark from which we may yet rekindle the sacred fire of independence and self-reverence. That it exists at all is a miracle. It has gone on living through the generations of hopeless drudgery in which every high aspiration was squeezed by famine out of the soul of the farmer's serf, a survival from the days when an able-bodied Englishman bred on and to the Land, might cherish the hope of one day calling a corner of it his own, at least as the tenant of a landlord without personal interest in the degradation of his dependents. It is the Love of the Land. I know nothing more touching than the rare expression of this feeling by men to whom one would naturally expect 'the Land' to be much the same as 'the shirt,' to a Jew-sweated seamstress in the East End. 'A *beautiful* bit of land!' says an old labourer admiringly, as he watches the plough-share turn the rich furrow.

He is on his way to the workhouse where his father died before him and where his son will follow him. That is what 'the Land' has done for him. And he has never planted so much as a potato in a bit of ground from which he could not be ejected by a month's warning before Michaelmas."

* * * * *

In 1901 a deputation of Suffolk farmers visited Denmark, and this deputation pointed out to their English fraternity that the "expense of farming in Denmark appeared to be, with the exception of State Aid, quite as high as, or higher than in Suffolk. The taxes and rent charge were about the same as in East Anglia, but labour, implements, etc., were dearer; but against this must be set the fact that the Danish farmer appeared to be satisfied with a much simpler and more frugal mode of life than is common here."

Though the English farmer was becoming more and more of a dairy farmer, the proverb was no longer a household word that, "If the cows be not milked by the time the herdsman blows his horn (sunrise) the dairymaid's wedding is spoiled."

It was difficult for the English farmers or their families to realise that they were not living as their fathers in the Golden Age of farming. They complained of the cost of labour, and yet labour was the one item of expenditure over which it was fatal for them to economise. Without a word of protest the unshackled labourer silently left the farms for the police force, the railway, the contractor's yard, the factory and the mine.

A sympathetic Government had passed in 1896 the Agricultural Ratings Act, which relieved the farmers of half their rates on their land, though not on their buildings. And this Act was continued in 1902. Critics have scornfully dubbed this Act "The Landlord's Relief Act," because, though tenants had immediate relief, eventually this sum found its way into the landlord's pocket in the form of higher rents. Whilst the depression lasted and landlords were seeking good tenants this was not possible; but at the turn of the tide no doubt landlords, by raising rents, reaped the benefit of the Act instead of the farmers.

Of more permanent value to farmers was the creation of the Board of Agriculture in 1889, and the subsequent grants made

for agricultural education, especially for technical instruction in dairying. It was a lucky chance which diverted money intended for publicans into the channels of technical education; and in 1889, on through the 'nineties, agricultural instruction was inaugurated at various institutions.[1]

Though farmers' sons were receiving a better technical education during this period, none of these grants benefited the labourer's son, save when in some miraculous way a labourer's son managed to win a scholarship. Whilst farmers had some extra educational advantages for their sons, those in the southern and midland counties resented as much as ever an Education Rate and the education of labourers. Our statesmen were discovering that education was kept down to the lowest level by members of country School Boards and managers of Church schools. Some slight improvement, however, was effected by the Education Act of 1902, when all elementary schools were placed under the local authority and the management of non-provided schools, such as Church schools, had some shadow of public control such as one representative from the Parish Council, one appointed by the County Council, besides the four appointed under the Trust Deed of the school.

No radical change, however, took place in the personnel of many school management committees, for the one representative from the Parish Council usually turned out to be the old cheese-paring educationist under a new name; and the same criticism might be applied to the managers appointed by the County Education Committee.

The opposition of farmers to the labourer's son being educated is understandable, as they saw the most intelligent lads, equipped with a higher wage-earning capacity acquired

[1] University College of North Wales, Bangor; University of Leeds; Armstrong College, Newcastle-on-Tyne; University College of Wales, Aberystwyth; Cambridge University; University College, Reading; South-Eastern Agricultural College, Wye; Midland Agricultural and Dairy College; Harper Adams Agricultural College; College of Agriculture and Horticulture, Holmes Chapel; Agricultural and Horticultural College, Uckfield; Essex County Technical Laboratories; Harris Institute, Preston; British Dairy Institute, Reading; Eastern Counties Dairy Institute, Ipswich; Royal Veterinary College; National Fruit and Cider Institute; Cumberland and Westmoreland Farm School; Hampshire Farm School; Agricultural Institute, Ridgmount.

through education, running away to the towns. Through books, too, boys had made the discovery of a different world outside the parish boundary.

This antagonism to education was never a marked feature of the northern or Scotch farmer who paid higher wages. It did not occur to the midland and southern farmers to try the experiment of offering higher wages and so attempt to retain the services of the brighter lads, whose quickened intelligence might prove of some material advantage to their employers. Farmers might retort that this was taking too great a risk, for the education given in rural schools, especially in Church schools, fitted no boy for a life on the land. This to a large extent was, and is still true, though if the boy had the priceless advantage of a good teacher who trained the young to think instead of stuffing them with facts which they could not mentally digest, the farmers would have had the advantage of trained intelligences which took an abiding interest in life and were filled with a noble curiosity.

Chemistry was more and more coming to the aid of the farmer; and agricultural labour-saving machinery was being improved. Financially, the turn of the tide in markets and prices, though slow in movement, began to be appreciable about 1906. The dairy farm, the cattle rearing-farm, the fruit farm and the market garden began to change the aspect of many a district hitherto given over to cereals and hops.

The very interesting Report by Mr. Wilson Fox published in 1905[1] on the Wages, Earnings, and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom, shows the average earnings per week, including the value of all allowances in kind, in England, to have been 16s. 9d. in 1898 and 17s. 5d. in 1902. The rates of wages in 1903 to 1905 remained at the same level as at 1902. Mr. Fox attributed the slightly upward movement from 1895 to 1902 to the scarcity of labour which had left the land for the mines and other industries. The mines of Durham and Glamorganshire, where wages were respectively

[1] Cd. 2376.

22s. 2d. and 21s. 3d., kept the average higher in England and Wales.

The lowest average weekly earnings in England were in Oxfordshire (14s. 6d.). The average rate of weekly cash wages in this county, according to Returns from farmers, was 12s. and the lowest rate usually paid in any rural district was 11s. The counties where the earnings were next lowest were Norfolk (15s. 3d), Gloucestershire (15s. 5d.), and Suffolk and Dorsetshire (15s. 6d.) each. The average rates of weekly cash wages in Norfolk were 12s. 4d., in Gloucestershire 12s. 11d., in Suffolk 12s. 9d., and in Dorsetshire 11s. 11d. In Dorsetshire the rate of weekly cash wages was 10s. in some districts.

In Wales the county where the average weekly earnings were lowest was Cardiganshire (15s. 8d.); the average rate of weekly cash wages being 14s. 6d.

It should be borne in mind, however, that these official figures were made up from the result of Returns filled in chiefly by employers who no doubt were accurate enough with regard to cash wages, but estimated the value of allowances, which brings a margin for error into the calculation. The Returns did not include casual labourers. The inclusion of the men in charge of animals increased the general averages by only 10d. a week.

The weekly average value of food consumed by a farm labourer, his wife and four children was found by Mr. Fox to be 13s. 6½d. in England, and 15s. 2½d. in Scotland.

The first independent investigator to present us with a carefully drawn picture of village life in the early years of the twentieth century was Dr. H. H. Mann, in his *Life in an Agricultural Village in England*.[1] There was at this time a growing re-orientation of economics in a sociological direction. Charles Booth broke new ground in his painstaking *Life and Labour of the People*, which was an extensive enquiry into the economic conditions of the life of those who inhabited the wilderness of bricks and mortar. Mr. Seebohm Rowntree continued this method in his study of York. Then Dr. Mann developed the plan in his study of village life, and

[1] *Sociological Papers*, Vol. I.

he was followed by Miss Davies in 1905 by her *Life in an English Village*; and later on Mr. Rowntree in his *How the Labourer Lives* applied the same method to rural life which he had to town life.[1]

Ridgmount, lying twelve miles from the county town of Bedford, is in the centre of one of the largest purely agricultural districts in England. The village is bounded on one side by the Woburn Park of the Duke of Bedford, who is the greatest landowner, house-owner, and employer of labour in the district. A considerable amount of freehold land had existed in the village, but by the process of absorption, the whole parish became almost entirely the property of the Duke.

Ridgmount is typically English, for not only has it its Duke, owning and controlling nearly everything, but, besides its church it has its Baptist chapel which is said to have been founded by John Bunyan. The whole population was directly or indirectly engaged in agricultural pursuits. The sole exceptions of any importance consisted in the residence of two railway signalmen in the village and of one man and three lads who worked in the printing works at Aspley Guise, two and a half miles distant.

The best cottages were those owned by the duke and let at 1s. 6d. per week, and this sum might be taken as the standard rent.

To get at a minimum standard consistent with physical efficiency Dr. Mann accepted Mr, Rowntree's basis, which was that the necessary minimum cost for food for a man was 3s. per week, for a woman 3s., and for a child 2s. 3d.

On enquiry Dr. Mann found that Mr. Rowntree's standard of 6d. per week for a man or woman, and 5d. per week for a girl or boy under sixteen years of age for clothes, was regarded by the people as an absolute minimum and these figures were therefore retained. A shilling a week was allowed for fuel after taking into consideration the amount of wood which could be picked up. Beyond this, 2d. per head per week was allowed for other sundries such as soap, light, furniture, crockery and similar articles. A man, wife and three

[1] *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, by B. Seebohm Rowntree.

children would therefore have a minimum necessary expenditure per week of 13s. 9d. in food, of 1s. 6d. in rent, of 4s. 1d. in household sundries, making a total of 18s. 4d. to keep them in physical efficiency.

Any family dropping below the minimum standard for food as stated is considered in a state of primary poverty, and the conclusion to which Dr. Mann came

"after every allowance had been made for subsidiary sources of income is that no less than 34·3 per cent. of the population of the typical agricultural village in Bedfordshire do not contain the necessary amount of money to enable them to remain in physical health. This percentage rises to no less than 41·0 when the working class alone is considered."

Dr. Mann discovered that

"if foremen be excluded, the average wages paid in the village amount to 13s. 7½d. per head per week for pure agricultural labourers, 65 in number, who are working at full rates. The Duke of Bedford's standard is about 15s. per week; the standard of the other farmers 12s. to 14s.; though, as has been said, the latter usually carry more extras than the former. This gives an average weekly wage of 14s. 4d. per head."

Now Mr. Wilson Fox in his Board of Trade investigation gave the average earnings in Bedfordshire as 16s. 2d., which is nearly 2s. higher than that of Dr. Mann's figures.

"After very careful examination of Mr. Fox's figures," wrote Dr. Mann, "I cannot help thinking that in working out his averages he has not allowed enough for the enormously greater number of the lower grade of labourers over higher grades; and I think if this were taken into account his figures would not be very different to mine. But by taking the actual figures obtained, it appears clear that a man earning the average rate of wages and the head of a household, must descend below the primary poverty line so soon as he has two children, unless he is able to supplement his income by an allotment, by fattening and breeding pigs, or by other means. It is also clear that he will remain below the poverty line unless the eldest child leaves school and begins to earn money, and that, even if he has no more than two children, his only chance to save will be in his later life when the children are grown up and are earning money or have left home . . . in any case during life it is a weary and continual round of poverty. During childhood poverty conditions are almost inevitable. As

a boy grows up, there are a few years intermission till, as a young man, he has two children ; then poverty again, till the children grow up, and, finally, at best, a penurious old age barely lifted above the poverty line."

The subsidiary sources of income for which Dr. Mann gave due allowance included allotments, and pig and poultry keeping. He found at this time that the profits to be obtained from allotments were not great because

"most of the allotments lie too close to the Duke of Bedford's park, where game is strictly preserved ; and the result is that havoc is usually wrought amongst the crops sown ; and that neither the keeping of pigs nor cows was encouraged by the Duke of Bedford."

The Duke of Bedford has the reputation of being one of the best of English landowners, and when further publicity was given to the above statements in my book *The Tyranny of the Countryside*, published 1913, the Duke's lawyers controverted them by pointing out that in 1912 out of the 21 acres in allotments eight were cultivated with corn, which carries with it the implication that game was not so abundant as in 1903 ; and that the keeping of pigs or poultry was not discouraged, but that "leave has to be obtained."

As to wages, the Duke of Bedford's lawyers stated that one of the Duke's men received 28s. a week in 1913, whilst eight of them received 15s. with extras that amounted to an average of £5 10s. a man. It is not quite clear if these extras were subject to a deduction of four weeks' wages during harvest time, which would then leave only £2 10s. net. However, rents and rates would swallow up the harvest money, thus leaving only 15s. a week for the maintenance of a family.

Dr. Mann ends his interesting paper with the following significant passage :—

"As at present existing, the standard of life on the land is lower than in the cities ; the chances of success are less and of poverty are greater ; life is less interesting ; and the likelihood of the workhouse as the place of residence in old age, the greater. It is evident that the outcry against the depopulation of the country and the concentration of population in the towns must remain little more than a parrot-cry until something is done to raise the standard of life, and hence the standard of wages in our

purely agricultural districts—to increase the chances of success in life, to make life more interesting, and to bring about a more attractive old age than at present, when under existing conditions the workhouse is apt to loom too large on the horizon of the agricultural labourer."

Miss Maude Davies, following in Dr. Mann's footsteps, investigated a Wiltshire village in 1905.[1] Corsley was different to Ridgmount in that it had no ducal park at its gates. It breathed a freer atmosphere as it had a class of small holders and a sprinkling of artisans such as wagon-makers, masons, etc., within its parish. Like Ridgmount it once had its home-industries of lace-making and strawplaiting, and Corsley also once had its handlooms and spinning wheels.

There were 220 households in Corsley and Miss Davies seemed to have managed to enter into all of them and find out, not from the employing class only, as the Board of Trade's investigators did, but from the wives and from the men themselves, what wages were earned and how they were spent.

She even gives a detailed account of the topics of conversation and the games played at the various public houses on one December night!

In 1841 the population of Corsley was 1621. In 1901 it was 824. During the depression farms, instead of being engrossed, were broken up and leased as small holdings, which became dairy farms or market gardens, and thirty families were living on their holdings of less than 20 acres each in 1905. As land reverted to grass, women ceased to be employed in agriculture. No longer did women gather stones off the plough land, plant beans, tie corn, and hoe roots (for a wage of 10d. a day), since the machine and the invading sea of grass drove them from the fields as effectually as the steam power of the town factory drove them from the land-loom and the spinning-wheel. Thus the girls left to don the cap and apron of domestic service, whilst the lads sighed and struck out townwards under the magnetic spell of the eternal feminine.

[1] *Life in an English Village.*

The average earnings of the carters were 16s. 9d. per week; of the cowman, 15s. 7d; and of the ordinary agricultural labourer 15s. 3½d., which sums included all allowance such as harvest money, milk, beer, house and garden.

Having ascertained the earnings of all householders Miss Davies next set to work to find out how the money was spent. She found twenty-eight families comprising 144 persons, mostly of the purely labouring class, who were living in a state of primary poverty. In order to define primary poverty she followed the formula set by Mr. Rowntree [1] and Dr. H. H. Mann. An estimate was made of the minimum cost at which food, fuel, dress, household sundries, and house room sufficient for efficiency could be obtained in the parish, and it was then seen how many families were below this standard, or in primary poverty. The standard adopted by Mr. Rowntree in York was less generous than that of the Local Government Board Dietaries for Workhouses. As has been shown Mr. Rowntree's standard works out at 3s. for a man or woman, and 2s. 3d. for a child, as the minimum necessary cost of food. Against the dearer prices of provisions in a village the author offsets the advantage of cheaper vegetables and fruit. No charge was made for rent in her table of figures as she considered the garden produce covered that; firing was put at 1s.; sundries at 2d.; and clothing at 6d per adult and 3d. per child. This meant that even a carter with his 16s. 9d., if he had as many as three children, would be in primary poverty. All the ordinary labourers, with the exception of one, were in primary poverty.

And whilst there were twenty-five families in this condition, no less than thirty-seven families were living in what Miss Davies calls secondary poverty, under which terms are classified those who had a surplus of only 1s. a head per week above the line of primary poverty—a line which unemployment or sickness may cast them over at any time, plunging them into the abysmal depths of extreme poverty.

And yet Corsley was what the author calls a "prosperous village," the prosperity of which was due to the distribution

[1] *Poverty: a Study of Town Life.*

of land in the parish, the good gardens attached to each cottage, the abundance of allotment land and the number of small holdings contained in the parish.

The most interesting discovery made by the author was that the children of the small holders, who cultivated holdings of different sizes, from about ½ acre to 10 acres, were infinitely more healthy than the children of the agricultural labourers, in spite of the fact that the market gardeners' families averaged 6·7, whilst those of the labourers averaged 4·6. There were therefore 2·1 per cent. less children born on the average in the family of the labourer than in that of the market gardener; and in these small families the death rate was just ten times as great. As in the investigations of later writers Miss Davies found that poverty in the life of the labourer was greatest when the children were young and unable to contribute a penny to the family income.

* * * * *

In 1906 England turned her attention from the ends of the earth and glanced at her own wasted acres. A gleam of hope entered the benumbed mind of the rural worker. The sweeping victory of the Liberal Party, with the election of a group of Labour Members independent of the old political Party, stirred that slow moving mind with hopes of better days to come. The Liberal Party had put forward a definite programme of small holdings, and of non-contributory Old Age Pensions.

The Labour Party, which was formed in 1900, committed the great Trade Unions of the country to a political policy untrammelled by the fetters which had bound men like Arch, Burt, Broadhurst, Fenwick, and John Burns. It had taken the field with an army of 1,000,000 workers and had won its first victory over the outposts of Privilege.

Once more the difficult task of organising agricultural labourers was essayed; not so much from the point of view, apparently, of gaining a great rise in wages, but to make the farm-workers class-conscious, and teach them to realise that they must win their own salvation by industrial and political action. The cry "Back to the Land" became insistent, and if it were not possible to raise wages to any appreciable

extent, an attempt should be made to get land for the labourers so that they could as cultivators of the soil win for themselves the full fruits of their labour.

A new Union came into being. It was called "The Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union." Mr. George Nicholls, who had been an agricultural labourer, and was then a small holder, had been elected as M.P. for Northants and he was chosen as President. But the leading spirit was Mr. George Edwards who, like Arch, hesitated and, like Arch, was persuaded by his wife to respond to the appeals made to him by the labourers. He frankly confesses that he had lost faith in the ability of labourers to organise, but his wife strenuously directed him to where the battle urged.

"This I would like to say," commented Mr. Edwards many years afterwards, "it shows the noble spirit of the woman. She knew it meant a life of loneliness for her, by taking me from my home, she being in most delicate health."

Not knowing where the expenses were to come from, he called a conference on July 12, 1906, at the *Angel Hotel*, North Walsham. He invited help from Sir Richard Winfrey, M.P., Mr. Herbert Day, and Lord Kimberley. He received a few pounds, and was able to pay for the rent and printing. Mr. W. B. Harris, of Sleaford, Lincolnshire, attended, as well as representatives from Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Norfolk. It was decided to give the new Union a three months' trial, and a committee was appointed, *pro tem.*, of which Mr. H. A. Day, Mr. W. G. Codling, and Mr. J. Sage were members.

"I left the Conference," remarked Mr. Edwards, "a poorer man. Mr. Day had made himself responsible for finding the 13s. per week which was the salary paid to this agitator; the pay of an agricultural labourer." It is interesting to find that on the day the Union was formed Mr. Edwards was elected as a County Councillor at a by-election.

A niece of Mr. Edwards did the clerical work at home. She had to be kept out of the 13s. a week, and for four years the work of the Union was done in Mr. Edwards'

bedroom in his little cottage at Gresham, for the use of which the Union was never charged a penny. By the end of December, 1906, fifty branches were opened and 1,500 members enrolled; and by the end of the first financial year 3,000 members had joined and over one hundred branches had been formed.

When the 13s. a week secretary had cycled over 4,000 miles, it was decided to appoint Mr. Thomas Thacker, of East Dereham, as organiser, with Mr. W. G. Codling as an occasional assistant, who was paid, I believe, the modest sum of 2s. for every village meeting he attended.

The path of an organiser, never easy at any time, was beset with great difficulties now. Mr. Codling had walked many a mile, willingly giving his time to the cause of the farm workers, before he received his stupendous fee of 2s. He had, however, to surmount many a difficulty before he attained the position of a properly paid organiser. As a Parish Councillor he was regarded as fairly harmless, but when he became a member of a Rural District Council—the particular preserve of farmers—on returning home at night he received his dismissal from his employer. A kind of boycott seems to have been instituted against this active member of the Union, and work being almost unobtainable, the Union, which was unable through lack of funds to appoint him as an organiser, made a collection and presented him with a hawker's basket; and thus he tramped the countryside equipping himself with the knowledge which was so useful to the Union in after years.[1]

The Small Holdings Act of 1907 seemed to give the agricultural labourer a chance at last to get his footing on the land, so that he might stand the equal of the peasant proprietors of nearly every continental country.

Compulsory powers were now given to County Councils to purchase land at the market rate, the Board of Agriculture being the final arbiter. Holdings up to 50 acres, or of the value of £50 a year, could be acquired for approved applicants. Moreover, Parish Councils had greater powers

[1] In 1919 as Labour Candidate he defeated Lord Hastings for the Norfolk County Council.

with regard to allotments. It became the *duty* of every Parish Council to supply every applicant who desired it with an allotment of 1 acre, with statutory powers to acquire 5 acres for every applicant. Parish Councils were also empowered to build a cottage on an allotment of not less than one acre.[1]

Difficulties in compulsory acquisition and arbitration —the blemishes of previous Acts —were to a large extent removed.

The intending small holder was no longer obliged to purchase the land, but could invest his savings in live-stock and implements.[2] Small holdings could be equipped by County Councils with not only cottages but also farm buildings.

County Councils were not compelled to buy land but could obtain it on a lease of not less than fourteen years or longer than thirty-five years (renewable for the same periods), and landlords had, of course, many protective clauses which prevented a private park or farm being taken, or woodland attached to a country house. Landlords could resume ownership if it could be shown to the satisfaction of the Board that the land was afterwards required for building, mining, or other industrial purposes.

One striking section in the Small Holdings Act gave County Councils the power to " promote the formation or extension of, and may, subject to the provisions of this section, assist, societies on a co-operative basis, having for their object, or one of their objects, the provision or the proper working of small holdings or allotments, whether in relation to the purchase of requisites, the sale of produce, credit banking, or insurance, or otherwise."

But this laudable provision, which would have been of immense value to small holders who lacked capital, has never been carried out by any County Council.

Here we beat up against the rock which barred the pathway of the labourer to the Promised Land. Agricultural

[1] It is rather a remarkable fact that no such cottage has ever been built under this provision of the Act.

[2] Less than 2 per cent. of applicants desired purchase (Cd. 7851).

labourers who had been trying to make both ends meet on a wage of 13s., 14s., or even 18s., a week, were not likely to be small capitalists; and when most County Councils made it a rule not to approve of applicants who could not show that they were in possession of capital to the extent of £10 an acre, many farm labourers fell out of the ranks of those who had been looking with eagerness towards the land which had been promised them.

Soon it was realised that it was not the labourer who was to be provided with a small holding, but the village publican, the blacksmith, the baker, the carrier, or the wheelwright, who used it in several counties for a "turn-out" for a horse, or a pony.

In his simplicity, many a labourer having heard the Small Holdings Act was passed, thought that he had only to pick out a certain field and ask for it, and it would be allotted to him. I knew of men who bought live-stock at the passing of the Small Holdings Act believing that it was only a matter of opening a gate into a field and turning the beasts in, and possession would be theirs!

Indeed, one or two instances have come to my knowledge of men keeping their cattle on the roadside expecting every day to hear that small holdings had been allotted to them, only to find at the end of the summer that they had to sell their stock. These of course would be the more prosperous of the men, generally piece-workers, who had already probably an acre or two rented from some friendly landowner or vicar, or men living adjacent to a common with grazing rights.

But with the ordinary labourer lack of capital was not the only obstacle. Very often he had to make his appearance before an unsympathetic, or even hostile Committee of a County Council, and be subject to a severe cross-examination as to his means and qualifications.

It was a short-sighted policy in a County Council dominated by landowners and large farmers, which objected to facilitating the working of the Small Holdings Act, for as has been proved in most districts the landowners obtain a higher rent from small holders than they do from farmers;

and farmers have the advantage in small holding districts of getting skilled workers to help them at those seasons when they are in need of hands.

Naturally, farmers, more than landowners, feared the spirit of independence being created in a class which had long been so patiently submissive: and some landowners—not certainly the most enlightened—feared the cutting up of estates where hunting or good shooting were to be had. The effective but atrocious barbed wire fence, so beloved by small holders, was an impediment or a death-trap to those who followed the hounds; and the battue would be signally curtailed by the introduction of small holders in game preserving districts.

Farmers, though, had a genuine grievance in that they feared that the "eyes of the farm" would be taken away by the acquisition of some essential field, cut out from the farm and injuring its economy. This is the strongest economic objection to small holdings, as worked under the Act. County Councils, however, should have followed the practice, which matured twelve years later, of acquiring whole estates rather than individual fields for small holdings, making it easy to carry out the provisions for co-operation in Section 49.

What really happened in a great many counties was, instead of the eyes of a farm being cut out, small holders had to be content with land at an inconvenient distance, and very often the poorest land of the parish; and the man who simply imitated the methods of the ordinary farmer, with less equipment and less facilities for marketing, and paying in many instances a higher rent, did not present a cheerful picture of agricultural prosperity.

Nevertheless, it is extraordinary that, as reports showed later on, the County Councils suffered so little in loss of rents that in nearly every county it worked out at less than 1 per cent.[1]

So slowly did the Act work, that an agitation arose to increase the number of Commissioners specially appointed

[1] In eight counties the loss in rents is "nil." In only two counties does the loss reach as much as 1 per cent. (Cd. 9203.)

to speed up the County Councils, and six more were appointed in addition to the two. This improved matters slightly and a certain amount of headway was made by counties such as Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Worcestershire, Somersetshire, Devon, Lincoln (Holland). Other counties, such as West Sussex, Westmoreland and Middlesex, did practically nothing at this date.

Impetus to the Small Holding movement was given by the publication of Miss Jebb's book, *The Small Holdings of England*. The founding of several Land Clubs (which had their origin in an obscure hamlet), together with the Central Small Holdings Society of which Mr. Charles Roden Buxton was the sponsor, expressed a wide-spread demand for small holdings. These societies became merged into the National Land and Home League, which was professedly non-party and did most useful work in suggesting amendments to Small Holding and Housing Acts. Its political activity had in many instances the desired effect of speeding up the administrative bodies in getting land for men who had been kept waiting, and of instituting Housing Enquiries.

This League embraced a number of Land Clubs in various parts of the country, and became perhaps the most expert body interested in small holdings, allotments, and cottages. Its chief workers were Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Pease, Mr. C. R. Buxton, Mr. R. L. Reiss, who afterwards became chief organiser of the Liberal Land Enquiry; Lord Henry Bentinck, M.P., Lord Saye and Sele, Mr. Lloyd Graeme, M.P., Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P., Mr. Montague Fordham, Sir Richard Winfrey, M.P., and Mr. T. Hamilton Fox. Another important society was formed in the Midlands with its headquarters at Birmingham. This was the Small Holdings and Allotments Association of England.

During the years which followed after the passing of the Small Holdings Act, whilst making my notes in different counties for my book, *The Awakening of England*, and whilst giving lantern lectures to labourers in out-of-the-way villages in Dorset, the Cotswolds and elsewhere, it was borne in upon me as I explained Acts of Parliament to them, how difficult it was to get anything done if there were no

sympathetic clergyman in the village. The men in these remote rural parts, and indeed in most counties outside Norfolk and Suffolk, were destitute of any shred of organisation. Hopelessly would I look round for any man left in the village capable of forwarding an application to the Board of Agriculture in the event of failure to obtain land, or to the Local Government Board wherever cottages were badly needed.

In vain too was it to look for " six registered parliamentary electors or ratepayers " under Section 23 of the Small Holdings Act, when allotments were not forthcoming, to send in a representation in writing; or after the passing of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, almost in vain was it to find four independent householders who would have the courage to sign an appeal to ask the Local Government Board to hold an enquiry on a village which contained insanitary cottages or needed the erection of fresh ones.

Good as the Housing and Town Planning Act was on paper it managed to close eleven cottages to every one it caused to be built; and the Small Holdings Act, though not intended to be a housing Act, managed to get many more cottages built than the famous Housing Act. Fear of eviction killed the effectiveness of the Act.

Two instances will illustrate how fear dominated village life. In 1905 the Hemel Hempstead District Council instructed the sanitary inspector to make a Report on the housing conditions of this village. In the course of his Report, referring to the labourers the inspector said: " If they complain of the cottages they live in they either get notice to quit, or if any improvement is made their rent is increased."

In 1906 the Hertfordshire County Council held a public Enquiry on the same subject, when the following evidence was given:

Q. You said people seemed afraid of something. What were they afraid of?

A. They were afraid to give me evidence because they were

afraid they would get into trouble. (This witness was a J.P. and a member of the County Council.)

Another witness, a retired solicitor, was asked :—

Q. Do you know that there is any difficulty in getting them (the cottagers) to come and give evidence to-night ?

A. They are very much afraid ; I have again and again talked to them, and they have said, " Don't say a word—don't tell."

And Chipperfield—the village under investigation—is an " open " village and only about twenty miles from London !

The Duke of Northumberland distinguished himself in the House of Lords over the debate on the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 by saying that " the provision of cottages is not an urgent matter, and it is much more important that owners should be safeguarded in the possession of their property." Verily a peerless ducal utterance !

All this went to prove to the most observant students of rural life, that it was no use passing Acts of Parliament at Westminster, if the people living in country villages were either left ignorant of their existence, or had not the courage to get them carried out. Those who lived close to the labourer and understood the fear that dominated his life realised that without some kind of industrial organisation, Acts of Parliament to give him a better time were futile pieces of parchment.

To begin with, the method of approaching a labourer, of informing him of the law and of giving him the opportunity to conform to it, is altogether a too complicated and chilling process. Since the Great War the public have had a regular schooling in Forms ; but before the War a Form to be filled up was something that was viewed with suspicion by untutored minds. (Even landlords seemed to find a difficulty in filling up Form IV.) The fear of a trap haunted them, and when unlettered men had to appear before an unsympathetic land-agent, backed by a hostile County Council, the labourer had a poor chance of communicating his desires.

A very learned man living in the county of Dorset set out to test the weight of the obstructions placed in the path of the labourer applying for a small holding. This was Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace, who, in the course of an interview, related to me the story of the amazing document he sent in to the Dorsetshire County Council making an application for a small holding.

He really wanted a small holding for his son and suggested to the County Council that if he cultivated some of the waste heath land where only gorse and heather flourished it would be doing a good thing for the nation. He was prepared to pay 10s. an acre rent, though the only access was by way of a cart track, and the tenant at that time was probably merely paying a shooting rent for the land.

The manner in which he filled up his application form must have puzzled bucolic councillors. "Age : 89. Experience : 65 years' gardening and science ; " and he got the village postman to attest to the uprightness of his character !

He had to wait nine months before anything was done, and then the County Council stated that the waste heathland might be let to him at £2 an acre—with the addition of a possible compensation to the sitting tenant !

"Of course I rejected the offer," said Dr. Wallace, "but it proved conclusively to me the failure of the Small Holdings Act as administered by a Council like the Dorsetshire County Council. This County Council's inquisition is worthy of the Russian autocracy. It is preposterous to treat a countryman who is naturally cautious and industrious with suspicion. The very fact that a man applies for land on which to work shows that he has character, without any further evidence. Besides, the cultivation of land helps to build up character ; and these County Councils overlook the fact, too, that if the applicant has a family, he brings with him to the soil potential capital."

I glanced across the heather, which stretched for miles down to Poole, where the harbour glistened like an inland lake. The air was redolent with pine and bracken. Surely it was foolish, I thought, to check the enterprise of a wonderful old scientist of ninety years of age, willing to use his knowledge on the uncultivated heath.

It was perhaps fitting that a county which is stained with the history of the Tolpuddle deportations, and where the pessimism of Thomas Hardy luxuriates, should plan a Small Holding Scheme, which but for the indomitable industry and pluck of the small holders themselves, was doomed to fail. After repeated applications from countrymen accustomed to farm work, this Council took over an entire farm of some 780 acres at Winterborne Zelston, on a thirty-seven years' repairing lease. Approved applicants received the following good news from the offices of the County Council :

" I am desired to remind you that the farm comprises good arable and pasture land, and that the holdings will be let at from 30s. to 40s. per acre, and the sum payable on entrance for tillage, etc., will be light."

Such were the words of the alluring legend written in July, 1909 ; and it was with high hopes that many a poor countryman read this statement in a letter sent to him. In 1912 I received a letter from a resident in the county begging me to come and look at the estate and exercise any influence I possessed to improve matters for the wretched tenants.

I motored past an estate enclosed by miles of wall, broken only by gilded gates where massive lions seemed to defy entrance to tillers of the soil. Then suddenly I came upon a congerie of mud cottages, dilapidated thatched roofs, and tumble-down outbuildings, lying in a hollow through which runs a stream. This was not a congested district in Ireland, but Winterborne Zelston, in the county of Dorset.

All cottage doors were thrown open to me. This I knew was the outward sign that the tenants were in the depths of despair, for no class objects to strangers entering their houses more than the peasant class.

Inside the first cottage I entered, a thistle seven ft. high had sprung up from a floor rich in plant food, in the room which was intended as a parlour. Though living amid tragic circumstances the tenant had evidently a sense of humour. He had tied it to the damp decaying wall with a piece of bass, as though it were a precious hothouse plant.

He dared not open his front window for fear of the bricks falling down. A fire could not be lighted in a grate. Needless to say the room was never occupied. It was preserved as a small holding mausoleum for Mr. Runciman to see, who was then President of the Board of Agriculture.

"They say £100 has been spent on our place," said a small holder's wife, pathetically, "and it is now supposed to be repaired. We have to pay 6 per cent. on that £100, and yet we don't know how the money has been spent. Our rent for the 16 acres, instead of being from 30s. to 40s. an acre, has now risen to £40."

An elderly Dorsetshire man, gaitered and wearing the look of a yeoman farmer, begged me to come and see how the County Council had erected a cowshed for him. He farmed only 6 acres, and his rent stood at £3 14s. an acre. He had to buttress the doors and windows of his cottage, and on the other side of his parlour wall his pony was stabled. He asked the Council to erect a detached cow-shed for about £25. It was built; but it stood empty. The tenant was afraid to house either a pony or a cow there. It was made of thin weather-boarding, roofed with corrugated iron sheets, which barely met and let in a good deal of wet. The concreted floor had to be laid three times.

The bluff old Dorset farmer drove his fist against the weather-boarding to show how easily he could have smashed it. This building instead of costing £25 cost £57, on which 6 per cent. was charged.

The choicest dwelling, though, was that occupied by a man with about 50 acres. It was so bad that the County Council had been driven by the sanitary authorities to build a brick cottage to take its place. On the occasion of my visit the family was still living in this cottage, and it was in such a shocking condition that when a storm arose the small holders' wife told me, "*We dusn't go to bed, it do wave so.*"

Even under normal circumstances few of the family dared to sleep upstairs, for all the bedrooms had to be propped up to prevent the thatched roof from tumbling in upon them; and having propped up the bedrooms, it was

found necessary to support the ceilings of the downstairs rooms!

"Do not stand there, sir," cried the housewife to me, as I was walking round to one side of the bed, "you might fall through. We always have to make the bed on this side."

Yet there was one piece of property, on this derelict farm, which was of value, and easily saleable at any time, and that was the iron fence put up to divide the holdings. It cost, I believe, half a crown a yard. On a small holder complaining of the heavy cost of this fencing, the cynical reply he received was: "Well, if the estate should fail, we shall have something solid to sell." "I see," answered the shrewd Dorset peasant. "You mean to charge us, then, with the rope with which you are going to hang us?"

I am glad to say my appeals to Mr. Runciman and the Treasury, through members of the House of Commons, were not in vain. Capital was expended on improving the estate, and I understand that to-day Winterborne Zelston, under war conditions of high prices, is flourishing.

But Winterborne Zelston must not be taken as a typical small holding estate. It was, fortunately, quite the worst I have seen.

Some County Councils, I am glad to say, showed a patriotic interest even before the War in acquiring desirable sites for small holders. But in spite of these favourable circumstances the lack of capital continually dogged the footsteps of the skilled agricultural labourer. Only one in three, or 32 per cent., of those who obtained small holdings, were farm labourers.[1]

What really did militate against the working of the Small Holdings Act, as well as the Local Government Act of 1894, and the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, was, as I have said, the absence of any organised rural democracy. The County Councils were still the exclusive preserve of the landed aristocracy, as the Rural District Council was of the tenant-farmers. These two classes were politically and economically one; and though they may not have had any organisation which differentiated

[1] Cd. 7851.

them politically from the labouring class, they had a very good understanding, which as far as local elections were concerned, found expression over the "ordinary" at the *Blue Boar* on market days.

Landlords, in many districts, wisely kept the political allegiance of tenant-farmers during the years of depression by lowering the rents; and farmers invariably showed their gratitude at the poll whenever an imperial or local election took place.

Farmers in 1908 were meant to derive some benefits from the new Agricultural Holdings Act, passed by the Liberal Government; but apparently the thistle of security of tenure was never firmly grasped in the hand of the statesmen of the day, with the result that tenant farmers rarely obtained the full compensation which the Act should have given them.[1]

Except for one small corner of England the farm workers were destitute of any political or industrial organisation. Their friends who exercised any influence as speakers or writers lived in towns. Save on paper rural England remained as undemocratised as it was in the days of the Crimean War. The one Act which had to some extent dispelled the haunting fear of the Workhouse at the end of a life's work —the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908—was an Act which local oligarchies could not prevent being enforced. The pension of 5s. a week, though small, relieved the old labourer from the stigma of pauperism—that intensely hated stigma—and at the same time made it more possible for sons and daughters to look after their aged parents.

The folly of the Act lay in its penalising thrift, and its encouragement of deceit. The State, instead of rewarding an old labourer or his wife for performing the miracle of saving a sum of money which could bring them in a few shillings a week, disallowed any pension at all if the yearly income exceeded £31 10s., and the weekly pension was reduced in proportion to the thrift of the pensioner. Indeed

[1] Sir T. H. Middleton considered that the Act was difficult to work in different parts of the country, and that the tenant did not obtain full compensation under it.—*Evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 1919.

one might have imagined the Act to have been framed by Samuel Butler or Mr. G. B. Shaw impishly imposing a penalty on the poor for their folly of saving.

Few village Hampdens dared to insist upon more cottages and more land whilst cottages were scarce, since almost half the labourers in England were living in farm-tied cottages,[1] and the raising of a voice for better conditions inevitably meant exile from their village. Foiled right and left in any attempt to improve their lot in life the younger generation set its face steadily towards the town, some of them under a vow to their parents never to become farm labourers.

It began to be foreshadowed that any improvement in the conditions of village life must be made by some central authority, with the appointment of a large number of Commissioners, both for the acquisition of land and the building of houses.

The House of Commons rather than the local council, seemed to be the arena where the battle for the emancipation of the labourer from chronic poverty would have to be fought. The minimum wage began to be seriously discussed in the House. Mr. John Burns insisted that few cottages could be built and let at an economic rent unless labourers were paid a living wage. Mr. Lloyd George was agitating the pockets of landowners by his famous Budget of 1909. The land was to be re-valued; there was to be a new Domesday Book. He was at war with the House of Lords. Soon, very soon, with his Budget of 1909 and his National Insurance Scheme of 1911, he became the most hated man in England, by those who had many possessions.

In 1909 one of the members of the new Union in Norfolk, Mr. T. G. Higdon, paid a visit to the veteran Joseph Arch, now eighty-three years of age and living in retirement in his old cottage at Barford. The agricultural labourers' movement owed a great deal to the fact that Arch possessed a cottage of his own. Had he rented one, it is probable that he would never have been allowed to do his work. He had married again, this time the daughter of a Norfolk farmer,

[1] Vide, *The Land Enquiry.*

and was living on an annuity purchased by Lord Tweedmouth, Mr. Tom Ellis, and other influential Liberals.

Arch, with old-fashioned peasant hospitality, immediately called to the kitchen for a bottle of beer and set his tobacco jar upon the table, and I should like to record here some of the answers made by Arch to the questions put to him by Mr. Higdon.

"Do you take any part in politics, locally, Mr. Arch?"

"Me? No; I'm too old for that now. Besides, Parish Councils cannot do much—neither good nor harm. I have done a little for the village in my time. I can remember when the people in this village had no idea of freedom or liberty. I have taught the villages something of freedom. But my work is all done now, sir. My work is all done," he repeated sadly.

It must have been with a gleam of triumph that the veteran agitator compared the wages received by farm workers in 1909 with the wages he managed to get for them in the 'seventies.

"What is this new Labourers' Union they have there now?" he asked suddenly.

"You have heard about it, then?"

"A little; not much," he said rather sarcastically.

"I think its objects are similar to those of your own Union—better conditions and wages. It also takes up the matter of smal holdings.'

"What are the wages in Norfolk now?" he next enquired.

"About 12s. or 13s. a week," was the reply.

"Is that all? Why," he exclaimed, "I got them up to 15s., 16s., and 17s. a week. They got it in Norfolk, they got it all down about here. They got it everywhere."

"The new Union has not done that yet," I said.

"Ah, we did then—in *our* Union," he said, with evident satisfaction at the remembrance of the accomplishment.

"Could those wages have been kept up, Mr. Arch?" I asked.

"Kept up? Yes. Why weren't they kept up? Because the Union went down—and the wages went down with it. The Union was *wrecked*. They broke up their Union and left me without a penny."

"You could do no more for them, then?"

"No; of course I could not. I stood by them to the last. I could do no more. If they had kept up their Union they would have been in a very different position to-day."

"You sympathise with the labourers still?"

"Sympathise with them? Of course I do! I shall always sympathise with them. What do they get for their harvest now?"

"About £6 or £7," I replied.

"We got it up to £8 or £9," said he. "But," he added, "it is a bad system of payment. It stands in the way of a better weekly wage. I always said it was a bad system. . . . What strike pay do they give?" he asked.

"Ten shillings a week—lock-out pay. I don't think they believe in striking," said I.

"Oh, we did *then*," he exclaimed.

"You ordered a strike sometimes, I suppose."

"I don't know about ordering a strike. The men would go on strike themselves in various places—then they would come to me and I always supported them."

"Would you advocate strikes now?"

"Certainly. What else can you do to get the wages up?"

Mr. Higdon, mentioning old friends by name, was answered by Arch, with a touch of that dramatic fervour which used to set the heather on fire in country districts: "*My friends are all dead.*"

When asked if he knew Gladstone, he replied:—

"Yes, dined with him lots of times. He was always very kind and friendly towards me. He was a great man—an eloquent man and a good man."

"From what I have heard about *you* from the labourers in Norfolk, you must have possessed some kind of eloquence yourself, Mr. Arch," I said with a laugh. "Was it that in you which got hold of the labourers so?"

"I don't know about eloquence," he said, laughing too. "I used to talk to the farmers a bit, you know, as well as to the labourers," he added with a fascinating twinkle in his eye—which twinkle gave a glimpse of the old time power and personality of Joseph Arch.[1]

After the death of this old champion of the agricultural labourer, (which took place in January 1919,) I wrote to the Rector of Barford, who used to visit Arch every week and had known him for fifteen years, asking him to give me his impressions of the old man.

"He was a man with considerable power of expression," replied the Rev. W. Ingham Brooke, "an orator who under-

[1] *Interview with Joseph Arch*, by T. G. Higdon (pamphlet).

stood well how to speak to his own class, but he was no administrator, and failed in all matters of management and detail. Like all such men he was intensely egotistical, and when we first came here, he compared his fame with that of Shakespeare !

" He was a man of very moderate opinions—very conservative in all his views, and strongly opposed to socialism. He was simply out to get justice for his fellow-workmen in the matter of wages and allotments, and this purpose he pursued with simplicity, honesty, and enthusiasm. He possessed no political imagination : being simply a Liberal of moderate John Bright views, taken more or less secondhand. And I do not think he even understood the elements of Liberal politics. He was, however, capable of considerable independence in matters within his ken, and would on his own subject obstinately maintain his opinion. The House of Commons was a great trial to him. He could not stand the late hours.

" I found his opinion in all matters of farming well worth listening to, and in my opinion far from ' making money out of agitation ' I think he would have done better in his calling as a hedge-cutter, at which he was very skilful.

" He was so ignorant that he actually started a Co-operative Society on his own in this village with no connection with the great co-operative movement. I gather he had never heard of the Rochdale Pioneers.

" As far as this village was concerned he had no following, and was defeated in a local election very easily. I don't think this is much to go by, as there are many flunkeys and grooms here, and his co-operative failure naturally did not help him. But he was very bitter about the desertion of so many labourers from his Union. The clergy, I think, backed the farmers, with a few exceptions (such as Osbert Mordaunt of Hampton Lucy, and the late Dean of Hereford), but Arch was very abusive and certainly went for them."

In a Cotswold village there still lives an old farm labourer who will relate how he once carried half a pound of candles on his hat to light " Joseph Arch's fe-ace " whilst he was speaking in the open. This same man will also tell you how he was fined before a Bench for poaching and how he vowed as he walked down the Court steps that he would snare a rabbit for every step he descended !

In 1910 a faint wind of freedom arose and stirred the dry bones of a shrunken rural democracy. Again it was the men of Norfolk who began a revolt of the fields which though temporarily a failure had a far-reaching effect.

PART SEVEN

GROWTH UNDER STORMY SKIES

1910–14.

THE years 1910-14 witnessed a new growth in British agriculture. Farmers were doing better than they had ever done since 1870. Managers of provincial Banks noticed a distinct improvement in farmers' accounts.[1] But the labourers did not share in this slowly rising tide of agricultural prosperity. Once more the Liberal Party was returned to power, but since the last General Election the cost of living had risen about 10 per cent.,[2] whilst wages had remained stationary. The labourers were still living upon political promises. Their hopes began to centre round the little man who had come from the Welsh mountains to be their David. At the sound of his carter's whip, thoroughbreds had taken fright and with ears laid back and lips drawn they had scampered to their fat paddocks, pawing the earth with irritation; and many a man who had been bold enough in rural districts to exhibit posters in favour of Liberal candidates was served with notice to quit.[3]

These were the days before the Labour Party attempted to win rural constituencies; yet as we shall see, farm

[1] The statistics of bankruptcies amongst farmers are illuminating.

Years	Annual Average Number
1892–1898	453
1899–1905	315
1906–1912	299
1913–1918	137

(Minority Report Royal Commission on Agriculture 1919.)

[2] Cd. 7733.

[3] Vide Lord Lucas' reply to Lord Willoughby de Broke's question, "whether they can produce any instances of tenant-farmers or agricultural labourers who have been evicted on account of their having voted for Liberal candidates for Parliament," in the House of Lords, February 24, 1914.

labourers began to turn their attention not only to trade union organisation, but also to a political organisation independent of the two historic parties. Writers who were interested in agriculture began to tour the country making notes. Articles appeared with greater frequency on the social conditions in rural England followed by a crop of books which in 1912-13 amounted to a rural literary Renaissance.

Whilst Sir Daniel Hall was busy with his Pilgrimage of British Farming for *The Times* I was making my notes in England and Ireland, which bore fruit as *The Awakening of England* (1912) and *The Tyranny of the Countryside* (1913).[1]

In the year 1912 Lord Ernle published a new edition of his memorable book *English Farming: Past and Present;* J. L. and Barbara Hammond their *Village Labourer*, 1760-1830; George Bourne his *Change in our Village*; Christopher Holdenby his *Folk of the Furrow*; the Fabian Society *The Rural Problem*; Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the Labourer Lives*; Miss Dunlop, *The Farm Labourer*; and finally in 1913 *The Land Enquiry* which supplied the ammunition for Mr. Lloyd George's great Land Campaign.

The crop was a big one, yet it was significant that every investigator's hand found its way to the one upstanding thistle which he grasped with unpleasant prickings, and that was the lowness of the labourers' wage.

The right agricultural atmosphere had been created and Mr. Lloyd George was too keen a politician not to take advantage of its favouring breezes. But of this, later.

Labourers, who were existing on 13s. a week with rising prices, could not live on political promises, nor wait for "Enquiries" to mature. Week by week, unceasingly, the wolf was knocking at the door. In May, 1910, a strike broke out at St. Faith's, Norfolk, which, though limited in area, attracted a great deal of public attention, and was

[1] I might be pardoned for mentioning these two books of my own, not because of the publicity which they had in the Press—several of our dailies praising or condemning them in leading articles—but because many men who have been farm labourers and are now branch secretaries of unions, or organisers, have been kind enough to inform me whilst I was writing this history of their indebtedness to these books.

destined, in spite of its failure, to lay the foundation stone of the now powerful organisation—"The National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union."

The Union was then known as the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union, with a membership of only 4,000. A branch had been started at St. Faith's in September, 1906, by Mr. George Edwards, the General Secretary of the Union, who addressed a meeting in the village. Twenty labourers joined, and amongst these was Mr. G. E. Hewitt, who was elected branch secretary.

Three and a half years passed, and the Branch membership rose to 131, but no rise in wages occurred. Men were still getting their miserable wage of 13s. a week. On April 29th, 1910, a member of the branch proposed that they should make a determined effort to secure better wages and shorter hours. Mr. Herbert Day, the vice-president of the Union, Mr. Thacker, the organiser, and Mr. George Edwards were summoned to a special meeting, and a resolution was passed that the General Secretary should write to all the employers in the parish requesting a rise of 1s. per week, and that work should cease at 1 o'clock on Saturdays.

It is interesting to note that the lack of a half-holiday continued to be the hay-seed in the shirt of the labourer. The notice was sent out to every employer, but not a single answer was vouchsafed. Thereupon it was resolved that every man should give notice to his employer to cease work on May 21 unless these moderate requests were granted. To the surprise of the villagers, the dawn of that morning broke with the sight of mounted police riding up and down the quiet village street with their warlike trappings glittering in the sun!

The Farmers' Federation had evidently impressed the chief constable at Norwich with the idea that the agricultural labourers were a dangerous class, or possibly this extraordinary exhibition of force was merely a demonstration such as we carry out among the Hill Tribes of India.

The Farmers' Federation displayed very much the same spirit as the last generation of farmers had displayed during Arch's active time. They imported men from all parts of

England and from Ireland, boarding them at great expense and paying them much higher wages than their own labourers had demanded, as an inducement to act as strike-breakers. Large huts were erected and police were drafted into the village to guard these huts from a possible attack of the dangerous Norfolk labourers. St. Faith's, indeed, might have been a village in the west of Ireland.

Naturally the farm workers and their wives were very indignant, but in spite of all provocation to break the law the men behaved with exemplary self-control.

Nevertheless, the anger of the men was roused when two or three of their fellow-workers were seen going back to work. These backsliders from trade unionism were entertained with some "rough music" drummed out of old pans and kettles as they returned from work. This musical performance having, as an eye-witness described it, "a marvellous effect on deserters," the farmers and the police made up their minds to stop it. Their ruse was successful. An old lady was sent out to meet her husband, and when the music began she shrieked with such dramatic force that it was alleged she had been frightened into a shrieking fit. No one had been spoken to, and no one had been touched, but twelve summonses were served to twelve men, some of whom were not there at all. In the next week they had to appear before the Bench of Magistrates, who promptly fined each man £5 with the option of two months' imprisonment.

Mr. Herbert Day, the vice-president of the Union, with great generosity came forward, as the men were about to be locked up, and paid the £60 from his own pocket. His generosity did not stop here. Whilst the strike lasted he gave 6d. a week per child to their parents who were on strike, and at Christmas he sent every wife a little present, so that the children could enjoy a Christmas dinner. Probably the issue would have been different if the men had been allowed to go to prison.

The strike dragged on till the end of the year, when it collapsed, though not through any faint-heartedness on the part of the men, who wanted to go on fighting if the members of

the Union outside St. Faith's would agree to impose a voluntary levy upon themselves. This they agreed to do. But Mr. George Nicholls, M.P., the president, and Sir Richard Winfrey, M.P., the treasurer, with other members of the Executive, were convinced that the struggle was hopeless, especially in view of the fact that it had already cost the Union £1,300, and funds were getting extremely low.

The strike was declared closed on January 9, 1911.

A sectional strike at the best of times is always highly speculative, and St. Faith's was not only surrounded, but permeated by non-unionists. The farmers had everything in their favour. It was the dead time of the year, and the supply of non-union labour seemed unlimited. It was a bitter blow to the men to go back to the old wage of 13s.; and, although promises had been made by farmers to take back their own workmen, victimisation followed.

Mr. G. E. Hewitt, the local leader, was made to feel the full force of the farmers' anger. Work was denied him, and he was faced with the prospect of leaving the village in which he and his father and grandfather before him had been born. Fortunately he was successful in obtaining a small holding, and after an uphill fight he managed to make a living.

To follow the history of this village Hampden, it is interesting to learn that he was eventually elected a member of the Executive of his Union, a member of the War Agricultural Committee of his county, a member of the central Agricultural Wages Board, and that he defeated with honours a local magnate at a County Council Election in 1919. Mr. Hewitt is a splendid type of the Norfolk peasant who has with great courage and single-mindedness fought without reward the battles of his fellow-workers.

At a conference of the Union in 1911 a vote of censure was passed on the Executive by the members for closing the strike, which led to the resignation of the President and Treasurer. Councillor W. R. Smith, of Norwich,[1] who had

[1] Now M.P. for Wellingborough.

taken an active interest in the battles of the agricultural labourers, became its new President, and Mr. H. A. Day was elected its new Treasurer.

Though the Union had suffered a reverse and its membership had declined owing to the surrender at St. Faith's, the publicity of the strike and the sympathy evoked caused its membership to revive in 1912. In that year a conference was held, when the rules and objects were revised and the name was altered to the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union.[1]

The Union now took a new lease of life. The National Insurance Act of 1911, which came into force in 1912, helped to bring grist to the Union mill, for labourers found it to be more remunerative to take up an Insurance Card with the Trade Union than with the Post Office. The new Union was registered as an Approved Society and many members of extinguished small benefit societies joined the National Agricultural Labourers' Union.[2]

The National Agricultural Labourers' Union now became affiliated to the Trade Union Congress, to which they were entitled to send two representatives each year. The failure at St. Faith's stimulated the organised workers of the town to come to the help of the agricultural labourers, and we shall

[1] The rural workers embraced those persons "who are Allotment and Small Holders, Agricultural Labourers, Gardeners, Navvies, Yardmen, Carters, Roadmen, Female Workers, Carpenters and Skilled Artisans, who from health, age, distance of nearest branch, or other sufficient reasons, are unable to join the recognised Unions of their respective trades, and any other person agreed to by a Branch and not vetoed by the General Council or the Executive Committee."

Its objects were declared to be:—

(*a*) To improve the social and moral conditions of its members.

(*b*) To establish central funds for the purpose of securing a better disposition of the land, by assisting to provide allotments, small holdings, improved housing accommodation, and better conditions of living.

(*c*) To secure proper legal advice when necessary and to shield members from injustice.

(*d*) To relieve members out of work through disputes, strikes, or lockouts, when sanctioned by the Executive Committee or the General Council of the Union.

(*e*) To encourage intercommunication with Unions in other parts of this country and other countries.

[2] Mr. R. B. Walker tells me he discovered a Benefit Society existing near Fakenham which had an unbroken record of membership since the halcyon days of Arch's Union, for though it had dropped its trade unionism it had retained its Sick Benefit contributors.

see how in 1913 a grant of £500 was made by the Congress to enable the National Agricultural Labourers' Union to employ an extra organiser or two.

Another Union also took the field on behalf of the agricultural labourer, a Union which was destined to play a most important part in organising the farm worker. This was the Workers' Union, which in 1898 could barely find the money to pay its country organiser 12s. a week. It had grown into a powerful urban union and turned its attention once more to its first love—the agricultural labourer. Its organisers argued that farm labourers would be in a stronger position if they joined the agricultural section of an urban union blest with funds, and this appealed to many men who had suffered from or heard of the instability of Arch's old Union. They saw too that it was difficult to carry out a successful strike without money, and there was certainly plenty of scope for an organiser who would take the trouble to organise agricultural labourers. Few trade unions had shown great eagerness to expend money in organising a scattered and badly paid body of workers on a contribution of twopence a week, and credit is certainly due to the Workers' Union for cultivating a crop which had borne but little fruit and was subject to be nipped in the bud by early frosts.

The desire of the Workers' Union to make the farm worker a trade unionist, was no doubt prompted by the feeling that the position of the unskilled workers of the towns was jeopardised by the importation of non-union men from the country when any industrial trouble arose. The gas-workers, the dockers, the navvies, had all experienced this cold draught blowing in from the open fields, eddying round their gates. Thus their organisers, Alderman Morley of Halifax, and Councillor Beard of Birmingham, began to send out their emissaries into Yorkshire and the Midland counties.

Fresh interest in Trade Unionism amongst the agricul tural workers was evinced in the spring of 1912 by the unveiling of a memorial to the Tolpuddle martyrs on May 27, 1912. On the top of the curved arch at the entrance to the little Wesleyan Methodist chapel of the Dorsetshire village are engraved the words "Tolpuddle Martyrs," and on

each side of the arch is a marble slab with words inscribed thus :

TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS.

ERECTED IN HONOUR
of the
FAITHFUL and BRAVE MEN
of this village
WHO IN 1834 SO NOBLY
SUFFERED TRANSPORTATION
in the Cause of
LIBERTY, JUSTICE,
and RIGHTEOUSNESS
and as a STIMULUS
to our own
and FUTURE GENERATIONS

"WE HAVE INJURED NO MAN'S REPUTATION, CHARACTER, PERSON OR PROPERTY; WE WERE UNITING TOGETHER TO PRESERVE OURSELVES, AND OUR WIVES AND OUR CHILDREN, FROM UTTER DEGRADATION AND STARVATION."
(GEORGE LOVELESS. Defence)

GEORGE LOVELESS.
JAMES LOVELESS
JAMES HAMMETT.
THOMAS STANFIELD.
JOHN STANFIELD.
JAMES BRINE.

UNVEILED by ARTHUR HENDERSON, M.P.,
May 27th, 1912.[1]

[1] It will be remembered that these men asked for an increase in wages from 8s. to 9s. a week, instead of which wages were reduced to 7s. a week and the men were threatened with a reduction to 6s. Only then, when driven down to starvation point, did these men attempt to form a union. Nothing has been finer in the history of our courageous peasantry than the bearing of these men during this cruel and vindictive trial. Besides the words of George Loveless it would be interesting to record the verses which James Loveless scribbled on a piece of paper and threw among the crowd as he was being led away for deportation.

God is our guide! no swords we draw,
We kindle not war's battle fires;
By reason, union, justice, law,
We claim the birthright of our sires.
We raise the watchword Liberty,
We will, we will, we will be free!

The little Wesleyan chapel is where these men used to worship, and it is interesting to note that Miss Hammett, a second cousin of James Hammett, is a leader at the chapel at the present time; and a son of James Hammett still lives at Tolpuddle.

I learn that James Loveless and Hammett spoke at one of Arch's meetings, and persecution again arose and labourers were evicted from their homes. Hammett's cousin then bought a field and built twelve cottages on it, so that the tenants could go to chapel and have a union if they wished.

An old lady, Mrs. Bush, the widow of a shepherd, remembers the martyrs and is willing to talk of them. Later on the National Agricultural Labourers' Union started a branch at Tolpuddle.

In 1912 labourers were becoming restless, not only as to wages, but also as to being secure of a home. They were repeatedly told by Lord Lansdowne on behalf of the Conservatives, and by Mr. Lloyd George on behalf of the Liberals, that they should be secure of their cottage homes, but instead, they found from bitter experience that their foothold was as insecure as ever.

In the depths of the winter of 1912, in January of that year, a most discreditable eviction took place at Foxham in Wilts, where lies some of Lord Lansdowne's property, though I do not mean to imply that he was to blame for what happened. The incident is worth recounting in order to show how the Town Planning Act worked, or rather how it did not work, in rural districts.

The County Council acquired a farm on Lord Lansdowne's property, and eight families received notices to quit their cottages. Some of the other cottages were bought by farmers who wanted them for their own employees, with the result that cottage accommodation became extremely scarce.

The Parish Council, typical of those in Wiltshire, consisting of seven farmers and two labourers, made no attempt to get cottages built; but two labourers, armed with Mr. John Burns' Town Planning Act, sent a petition, signed also by two other men, for the application of the Housing Act, to the Rural District Council at Calne. Calne is the centre of the pig industry, and its Rural District Councillors, it is recorded, received the application with swinish laughter. With a chuckle of sardonic merriment they referred the matter to the Parish Council of Bremhill—the Parish Council on which seven of their farmer friends sat. An application was also sent to the County Council.

No response, save a curt acknowledgment, came from the County Council to these poor labourers of Foxham in direful distress. "The Cerberus of officialism had snarled them back with all his three pairs of jaws," wrote Lieut.-Col. D. C. Pedder, who lived in this neighbourhood. The appeal then had to go to headquarters—that is, direct to the President of the Local Government Board. Through the good offices of the National Land and Home League, sufficient

prima facie evidence was adduced for Mr. John Burns to order an immediate enquiry. This time twenty men came forward in the crowded little village schoolroom to bear witness as to the lack of cottages, and how, under notice to quit, they had searched in vain for a house. The tragedy of one man, with seven children down with whooping cough, under notice to quit an overcrowded cottage, was startlingly revealed, and the story of how youths and girls were driven to the towns was unfolded.

But all that the Enquiry produced for these people was a revengeful retaliation on the part of the recalcitrant councillors.

What happened was an eviction as brutal as any in the annals of English country life. The County Council, one of the three jaws of the three-mouthed Cerberus, promptly took its revenge. It snapped at the two ringleaders and threw them bodily out upon the roadside. In a heap on the deep snow under a leaden sky were piled the household goods of Robert Grimshaw and Alfred Fortune. In a group collected the villagers, standing silent and sullen under the fresh indignity dealt out to them.

Some very extraordinary evidence was brought out at the Enquiry. Lord Lansdowne's agent actually said he had never known that there was any demand for cottages at Foxham. The Surveyor of the district "had never heard of any demand for cottages." The Chairman of the Rural District Council, which is held at the centre of the pig industry, had "never heard of a want of housing accommodation in that parish."

The men who took a leading part in the Enquiry were driven out of the neighbourhood. No wonder the village labourer felt that the odds were too much for him in a fight for justice. In his hazard of life he had to play with those who had loaded dice. Even when he won, the cost of victory was too heavy for him to pay.

"I do not think there is much difference of opinion as to the main facts," said Lord Lansdowne, in 1913, on the subject of housing. "There is throughout a great part of this country a very serious shortage of housing accommodation in our villages.

What are the results? In the first place, a number of houses are allowed to survive which beyond all question ought to be condemned as unfit for human habitation. The second result is that many deserving men and women who want to find a home in the village are wholly unable to find it. The third result is that where you have barely enough cottages to go round, the man who has got a cottage, particularly if the cottage is let with the farm, has an uneasy feeling that he is too much at the mercy of his employer, and if he loses his job he stands a very good chance of losing his home into the bargain. That is not a desirable frame of mind." [1]

A different kind of Enquiry to the one at Foxham was held in the adjoining county of Somerset a year later. Here the laxity of the Rural District Council was being tried by the County Council. The atmosphere was quite different from that of Foxham, and the reason not far to seek. The four who made the requisition to the County Council were not labourers this time, but four influential middle-class Quakers; and the Medical Officer of Health for the County, Dr. Savage, was, fortunately, one who possessed a moral passion for sanitation.

I happened to be present at the Enquiry [2] and was struck by the independence of a workman, who needless, to say was not an agricultural labourer. It was when the Chairman of the County Council (who conducted the Enquiry in a most admirable manner) asked the workman if he would like a cottage with three bedrooms, a Rural District Councillor sneeringly interjected: "And a bathroom, too, I suppose?"

"Yes," retorted the workman sharply, "can't we be clean as well as you?"

The Enquiry was held both at Shipham and at Winscombe. The conditions of affairs at Shipham were illuminating. Many years ago lead mines were worked here by squatters, who built their cottages on what appears to have been No-man's land. It would be difficult to find a fairer spot in England than this, where between the escarpments

[1] *The Times*, June 23, 1913.

[2] A Citizens' League had been formed at Winscombe after reading *The Awakening of England*. I had been asked to lecture to it.

of the Mendip Hills can be seen the Bristol Channel glittering in the sun, and, beyond, the shadowy form of the Welsh hills, and it is here " small ownership " has been carried out to an extent rare in the annals of rural England.

In 1841 the population was 707; in 1911 it was 359. Though the population had dwindled to one half, the cottages were not only legally overcrowded, but according to the Medical Officer of Health for the county " grossly and morally overcrowded." Thirty-three of the sixty cottages inspected that year were occupied by their owners. In one cottage three boys and two girls slept in one room, while the mother and three children slept in the other. In the bedroom of another cottage slept two youths aged sixteen and nineteen, and two girls aged fourteen and nineteen. And it should be remembered that most of these bedrooms were so small that the cubic space allowed for each person was often far less than that permitted in a common lodging-house. In one bedroom, with an area of not more than 700 cubic ft., slept three persons of two sexes aged fifteen, twenty, and twenty-one. In two very small bedrooms of a capacity of 660 and 480 cubic ft. respectively slept a mother and eight children. The Clerk to this Council admitted that no systematic inspection had been made of this grossly insanitary village for at least *seventeen years*.

Now at this Enquiry, the ratepayers—that is to say the small owners living in their miserable hovels—were furious at the bare thought of new cottages being built with a possibility of an increase in their rates. This hare was, of course, soon started by the members of the Rural District Council.

Where the local authority is lethargic and the parish is owned by exceedingly poor people the administration of Health Acts becomes a dead letter.

The Medical Officer of Health stated that Shipham contained the worst cottages to be found in Somerset.

One can hardly have two more striking instances of the evils arising from leaving land in the hands of either large or small owners than the parish of Shipham and the adjoining parish of Rowberrow, which is entirely owned by its Squire.

Here the population in 1831 was 392. It has now dwindled to one-fourth of that number.

The village lies in a beautiful gorge, and the wrecked roofs and dismantled walls of the stone cottages give it the appearance of some Alpine village which has suffered from an avalanche. Nothing worthy of the name of farming is to be seen on the land, all laid down to grass. Sport alone seemed to absorb the energies of the governing classes. The vicarage was an empty house and the church was served by the Vicar of Shipham. The school had also been closed, and on the death of the present generation of squatters every bit of land reverts to the Squire, which means that in time this beautiful little gorge will be emptied of life.

The curate of one of the villages, a fine type of the Church militant, a major who had taken Holy Orders, said to me: "I know far better than the inspectors how these rooms are overcrowded, for I am called to these cottages at night, and I rarely rise from the floor with dry knees. Dirt lies for ever entombed between the stone flags. We do not allow this scandalous kind of thing in India."

Not all sporting villages by any means were like Rowberrow. Some were extremely tidy and well preserved. Such a one was the village of Hascombe in Surrey, noted for its beautiful beeches, which I visited in 1912. Game preserving seemed to be the most thriving pursuit, judging by the ill-cultivated fields, the number of pheasants to be seen, and the luxurious motors disgorging their "guns."

The entire parish was owned by one man. The wages of the labourers, I found, were 13s. a week.

So dear were the necessities of life here that any one above the rank of a labourer who could command the services of a horse and trap, drove to Guildford, eight miles away. But the married labourer remained tied to his cottage, manacled by low wages, and squeezed by high prices. His mind, though, was well looked after. There is a beautiful little church here, as there generally is in such villages; and the churchyard is kept like a gentleman's lawn, to which the labourer contributes his bones. He is provided with a model village institute and the *Morning Post* to enlighten

him with social and political knowledge. In spite of these intellectual advantage his wages were 13s. a week

In one of these cottages a labourer's wife heroically brought up a family of nine children on 12s. a week, and they all had to sleep in two bedrooms. At times the only way the mother could satisfy the pangs of hunger in her children was by giving them cooked nettles and bread and a hard pudding made of flour and water. For many weeks this would be their daily dinner.

A few miles distant I came to an estate made tragic by the death of Whittaker Wright. This was Lea Park, now owned by the great Liberal capitalist, Lord Pirrie. There was no necessity here to display that excellent electioneering placard of his Party, "Keep off the Earth," for five miles of brick wall are more compelling than words. Inside these walls the good agricultural land nourished deer and pheasants.[1] Across the park and over the public highway stretched a private motor track which took my lord when he pleased to Haslemere. If a carter was fortunate enough to obtain employment inside these walls he had to be prepared to renounce all worldly pursuits, such as the keeping of fowls or pigs, or even that of adding to his family should he be fortunate enough to inhabit one of the charming lodges.

In 1912 wages were still low, cottages scarce and land still beyond the reach of most labourers.

Mr. Runciman in 1913 had to admit to the House of Commons that of the 6,000 approved applicants still waiting to get land "there were very few labourers amongst the applicants because the low wages paid to agricultural labourers did not enable them to lay by even the small amount of capital required for a small holding." To facilitate labourers stocking their holdings the Government of 1912 induced Joint Stock Banks to advance loans to credit societies. But this, as can well be imagined, met with little or no success.[2]

[1] "Lord Pirrie was fined £50 at Guildford yesterday for failing to clean and cultivate a farm after receiving three notices from the Surrey Agricultural Committee."—*Daily Mail*, 13 *March*, 1920

[2] I pointed out at the time that the Government by shirking the straight course of lending the money itself would bring about a dismal failure.

The position of the labourer in 1912 was graphically summed up by a Conservative, Mr. R. E. Prothero, who has since been made President of the Board of Agriculture and a Peer.

"All the employing classes have moved on and upwards in wealth, in education, in tastes, in habits, in their standard of living. Except in education, the employed alone have stood comparatively still. The sense of social inferiority which is thus fostered has impressed the labourer with the feeling that he is not regarded as a member of the community, but only as its helot. It is from this point of view that he resents, in a half-humorous, half-sullen fashion, the kindly efforts of well-meaning patrons to do him good, the restrictions imposed on his occupation of his cottage, as well as the paraphernalia of policemen, sanitary and medical inspectors, school-attendance officers, who dragoon and shepherd him into being sober, law-abiding, clean, healthy and considerate of the future of his children. To his mind, it is all part of the treatment meted out to a being who is regarded as belonging to an inferior race." [1]

* * * *

Mr. Lloyd George kept on making speeches, but the opening of Parliament, 1913, shattered the rising hopes of the farm workers. The King's Speech produced not a ray of light in the homes of those who follow the plough. They knew the Liberal Land Enquiry had been on foot for some time, and when Parliament opened they fully expected a pronouncement as to wages. Mr. Lloyd George had roused the whole countryside into two opposing camps. Was it only political window dressing after all. Was all this platform oratory merely theatrical display, they began to ask one another.

"They irritate the slumbering dominant Party without strengthening the insurgent," wrote George Meredith in one of his letters. These words might have been written of Mr. Lloyd George. Indeed his public performances at this period resembled the part of Harlequin in the great Land Campaign Pantomime which was frequently put on for one

In 1914, sixteen Credit Societies obtained advances from Joint Stock Banks, the total amount advanced being £1,750! The number of small holdings provided by County Councils of which the holders were in actual possession on December 31, 1914, was only 13,085. The total quantity of land acquired under the Act in England and Wales was less than 1 per cent. of the whole cultivated area (Cd. 7851).

[1] *English Farming: Past and Present.* By R. E. Prothero.

night only when the populace became restive, and taken off again immediately the plaudits of the crowd rose to fever height.

The Government pantomime had the longest run in the great Budget performance of 1909, when Harlequin displayed such antics in smacking landlords with his pliable wand that he created quite a commotion in the stalls. Thoroughly alarmed they rushed back to their country houses and stirred up the countryside.

There was no doubt about it, the landlords really were scared.

But it was observed that whilst the Conservative landowners were alarmed, the more intelligent landowning Liberals went their way untroubled. They evidently knew what would happen at the fall of the curtain.

The resounding thwacks of the Harlequin barely bruised a single member of the possessing class. Agricultural land was exempt from taxation, and land other than agricultural had merely to bear the miserable tax of a half-penny in the pound, which after all was really not worth the picking up. The possessing class sent up a sigh of relief as the price of agricultural land steadily rose 15 per cent. in value. When the Budget Play was over and those who had toiled in the fields went home to find their larders empty, hungry teeth began to glisten in rural constituencies. It indicated that the Earth Hunger was not satisfied, that those who worked for masters still had to rear families on inadequate wages and live in wretched cottages. Then it was that the Government sent their popular comedian into the provinces to " sever the shackles of feudalism "—with striking phrases.

It apeared that for the successful presentation of the comedy, to equip it thoroughly with trap-doors and exits, the services of a great number of scene-shifters had to be engaged. This new play they called the Land Enquiry.

The Government had suddenly developed a passion for rural scenic effects. Most of those who listened to the fiery speeches delivered by leading politicians during the Budget and the House of Lords Campaign imagined that these statesmen were fully equipped with knowledge of rural

life. But they were mistaken. In spite of the State Departments of the Local Government Board, the Board of Trade, and the Board of Agriculture, not a member of that essentially urban Government appeared to know how the rural poor lived. Indeed the statesmen seem to be no better informed than Pitt, who in 1800 introduced a Bill to ameliorate the conditions of the rural poor, but soon dropped it because he was "inexperienced himself in country affairs, and in the condition of the poor, and would not press the Measure on the attention of the House." And that was over one hundred years ago!

We were assured that the new play would, in scenic effects, excel any picture ever presented of rural England. But when is it going to begin?" was asked, as people impatiently stamped their feet. "You wait," came the answer. "It will be quite worth your while, for Harlequin is getting new tights made, scintillating with spangles, and a new wand —a perfect weapon that will tickle the bare backs of the occupants of the stalls, and effectually bring down the gods."

Whilst clamouring for the new play to begin the people were told that a popular spectacular play called *The Tragedy of the Near East*, would have to be put on first; and then when it was found that this drama began to draw very poor houses the directors and large shareholders of the State Repertory Theatre decided that the Trailing of the Red Herring should form an attractive feature of the New Pantomime display, with the introduction of a new act called the Education Act. (This, it was rumoured, was presented to give a chance to the heavy tragedian who had taken the lead in military dramas. It was said that he had objected to all Government pantomime being especially written for Harlequin.)

But the people said they were tired of education plays. These plays always sent them to their homes with a fierce hunger for food.

"Let's have Harlequin!" they shouted. "He is the man for us." So to appease the people the Government let Harlequin appear again—for one night only—and though Columbine had now turned her back on him, he performed at the National Liberal Club on Friday, January 31. The

stalls were again thwacked, and the claque cheered at his coruscations. It had its effect. "You see," wrote one of the critics in the Stage Box who signed himself P.W.W., and who kindly explained all Government plays to the readers of the *Daily News*, "abundant evidence is already available to justify the following forecast :—

"The statutory establishment of a minimum wage of at least £1 a week for agricultural labourers.

"Every labourer who requires a cottage shall have one (with a plot of land) independent of farmer or landlord."

Then followed the usual epilogue. Five days later, in reply to a question by Mr. Charles Bathurst, who asked if the performance at the National Liberal Club represented the policy of the Government, the Prime Minister answered with some asperity that "Mr. Lloyd George did not formulate any proposals and that any statements which have since appeared in the Press professing to represent the policy of the Government are pure efforts of imagination."

And the subtle Harlequin himself, when questioned, had to admit with a smile that he had only been having a fling on his own, and had propounded no act of statecraft. The meaning of that smile has not been lost.

The "gods" were brought down but to be buried !

The curtain then went up on an entirely new play. The Prologue had already been uttered, and that great army of the dispossessed who toiled long for a mere pittance, housed in hovels, and still denied access to the land, men who "Learned his great language, caught his clear accents," turned away heart-broken to their desolate homes. Their leader, their one valiant David, who was to have broken the "shackles of feudalism," had deserted them. On March 10 their doom was sealed. The King's Speech had been uttered. There was nothing for them. Instead, out of their labour, money was to be raised to *develop cotton growing amongst the Soudanese* ; while for them, the Labourers of England, there was nothing, not even better wages.

Country house parties began to assume a more cheerful aspect. The densest of backwoodsmen began to realise that strong words break no bones, nor do they injure incomes.

The Chancellor even then might almost be regarded as an asset to reaction. It may be very well after all to have a Harlequin who can tickle the palate of the people by references to dukes, but who leaves ducal incomes undisturbed.

Mr. Lloyd George lost his chance of becoming the Cobbett of the twentieth century. Indeed "the raging-tearing campaign" (vide Tory papers) forcibly recalled a story told of Abraham Lincoln, who when opposed in Court by a vociferous and turbulent counsel: "He reminds me," said Lincoln to the judge, "of the farmer who was overtaken by a thunderstorm and knelt down to pray. 'Oh Lord,' he cried, 'cannot we have a little less noise and a little more light.'"

* * * *

Yet politicians and others who live in the stately homes of England were soon to have a rude shock. In May 1913 a strike broke out in South West Lancashire, and where it was raging mightily stood the country house of Lord Derby, which the King of England was about to visit.

Whilst Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Lansdowne had been making their political speeches, the cost of living had been steadily rising, and Lancashire was the first county to express its feelings in no uncertain voice. Rents and retail prices had risen in Lancashire and Cheshire to 13·3 above 1905.[1] But it was not only a question of wages; it was primarily a matter of hours; and the refusal of the farmers to negotiate with the men's leaders led to the gravest agricultural strike in this country since the days of Joseph Arch.

In the autumn of 1912 the farm workers in South-West Lancashire were entirely unorganised, and as many of them, especially the wagoners who took market garden produce into the large towns, had to work exceedingly long hours they appealed to the National Agricultural Labourers' Union to help them to improve their conditions. Mr. George Edwards seized the opportunity and the Union quickly grew in strength, forming nearly thirty branches during the winter.

The district was aptly described by *Country Life* thus:—

"To many of our readers the district will at once 'come home' when we add that it is the country of the Grand National and

[1] Cd. 7733. Vide Appendix.

the Waterloo Cup, and having said this there is surely little if any need to say more as to its position and general appearance." [1]

Perhaps nothing more need be said to sportsmen, except to add that the land here is owned by a trinity of Earls: the Earl of Derby, the Earl of Sefton, and the Earl of Lathom, and those who are familiar with their Debrett will now feel themselves geographically at home. To those not so familiar with their Debrett, I might add that this neighbourhood had to satisfy with market garden and farm produce the insatiable markets of Liverpool, Warrington, St. Helens, Wigan and Southport, entailing in many instances extremely long hours for the carters; and it is little wonder that in a neighbourhood where football is popular the men resented being deprived of a half-holiday, which is claimed by every town artisan.

In May, 1913, the men formulated their demands, which were:—

(1) Saturday half-holiday, work to cease at 1 p.m.
(2) Minimum wage of 24s. a week.
(3) 6d. an hour overtime, and
(4) Recognition of the Union.

The *Preston Guardian* [2] declared "the Union lived in Dreamland." If so, it was a Dreamland where tired wagoners' journeys were bounded by a horizon of distant furnace fires.

The farmers, though, wasted no time in poetical fancies, but promptly dismissed their hands, giving them notices to quit their cottages. This action was started by one farmer who, without consulting his neighbours, immediately dismissed his eight men. This arbitrary action caused great indignation amongst the labourers, and a demonstration was held one Sunday at Barton, close to the residence of an employer who had locked out his men the previous Sunday. The procession, headed by a brass band, consisted of 4,000 persons. Mr. George Edwards said he had never witnessed so much enthusiasm and determination in the forty years he had been in public life.

[1] *Country Life*, May 25, 1913. [2] May 24, 1913.

A resolution was passed unanimously condemning the farmers' attempt to prevent the workmen combining.[1]

The farmers stubbornly refused to recognise the men's Union. The Chairman of the Farmer's Union declared that, " he felt sure that if there were only a united force they could squash the Union and take the wind out of the sails of Mr. Edwards, the secretary."[2]

The usual argument was advanced that the whole movement was engineered by outside people who were agitators, though judging from a statement made by the *Graphic*, the agitators were not very well paid :—

" As Mr. Edwards (the secretary of the Union), an assistant secretary and two organisers receive in all about £200 a year, the enthusiasts at the head of the organisation are hardly leading it for what they can get out of it."

Mr. Edwards exhausted every method of persuasion to get the farmers to confer with him. Then with that pathetic belief, which is characteristic of the English peasant in the goodwill of the landed aristocracy, he appealed to Lord Derby to act as mediator.

It was a wise step on Mr. Edwards' part, for the King was to be the guest of Lord Derby, upon whose estates the men had downed tools. At first Lord Derby definitely refused, but later, no doubt feeling that a portion of his domain in revolt would not be a pleasant picture to present to the King, he consented to act as mediator between the Farmers' Union and the Labourers' Union. Since the strike had become not only an affair of farm workers but also of the Industrial Unions who were showing their sympathy and helping the farm workers with their organisers, Mr. James Sexton, of the Dockers' Union, acted as one of the negotiators.

Lord Derby's intervention, however, went no further than influencing the farmers on his own estate, on which the men withdrew their notices unconditionally and returned to work. In this strike we get portents of the Federation of Transport Workers which came to be such a powerful factor in the industrial and political history of our country

[1] *Reynolds*, June 18, 1913. [2] *The Times*, May 24, 1913.

By the aid of the Dockers' Union and the National Union of Ships' Stewards peaceful picketing was carried out with considerable success. Boats landing Irish labourers at Liverpool, who were imported as strike-breakers, were met by the pickets, and many Irish labourers either joined the Union or were persuaded to proceed to Yorkshire for work.

On July 4, the Ormskirk Branch of the National Union of Railwaymen gave forty-eight hours' notice of refusal to handle produce from the affected area, but before the railwaymen's threat was carried out the strike was ended. At the suggestion of the Superintendent of Police at Ormskirk a solicitor, respected by both sides, was called in as mediator, and he drafted a report which was accepted as a settlement.

The men can claim to have won a victory, for in the history of agricultural labourers it was the first time they had ever received by collective bargaining a reduction in the hours. Overtime was granted at the rate of 6d. an hour and there was a general rise in wages of 2s. a week.

The strike lasted about a fortnight, and nearly £800 were subscribed from outside sources. Nothing, perhaps, more fortunate could have happened to the Labourers' Union than to have a strike in an industrial county like Lancashire, for hot with the memory of the defenceless condition of farm workers and the time-honoured arrogant tone adopted by their employers, the industrial workers at the Trade Union Congress of that year made a memorable grant of £500 to the N.A.L.U.[1] for the purpose of helping them to organise the whole country.

To most people unacquainted with the long-dying, hard customs of payment for labour in rural districts, it came as a surprise to learn that whereas the farm workers of Norfolk were beaten in their struggle to obtain a rise of 1s. a week on a low wage of 13s. the farmers of another county who were already paying about £1 a week to all classes of workers were able to pay another 2s. a week.[2]

The districts round Ormskirk, Garstang and Fylde yield,

[1] For brevity's sake the National Agricultural Labourer's and Rural Workers' Union is referred to in these pages as the N.A.L.U.

[2] Cd. 5469.

it is true, rich harvests, but much of Lancashire soil gets its "back broken" and is soured by the poisonous fumes from the great alkali and copper works and coke ovens, and soot falls like a funeral pall over the farms which skirt the large manufacturing towns. Owing to this bad atmosphere abortion and tuberculosis are rife among cows and the animals' nostrils are found to be sooted up. Round the great industrial areas trees, hedges, fruit tree and flowers are blighted and killed.

If farmers were able to pay 22s. in Lancashire why did not the farmers in Norfolk pay more than 13s. ? It showed once more that payment of good wages was not dependent upon prices or climatic conditions. It was a matter of custom in Norfolk, and the farmers of Lancashire had to pay more for labour because of the competitive industries of the adjacent towns.

During the Lancashire strike another strike broke out at East Chinnock, in Somerset. It was occasioned by the action of one of the farmers discharging two men belonging to the Union.

Very strong feeling was evinced over the foolish action of the authorities in bringing in the police to protect the farmer and the "blackleg" labour he imported, even to escort them to church! An agreement was eventually arrived at with the employers resulting in the advance of 2s. a week for the men and 1s. a week for lads.

The Lancashire strike painfully proved to Mr. George Edwards, that veteran fighter for the agricultural labourer, that his advancing years and increasing ill health[1] could not sustain another such exhausting campaign, and his assistant, Mr. R. B. Walker, was elected to take his place.

Stalwart trade unionist though he was, Mr. Edwards had the foresight to realise that without a statutory minimum wage an advance in wages would never be secure, for it was in the spring of this year that he wrote the following words :—

"On the farmer's own figures, the labourer's wages in Nor-

[1] Mr. Edwards sustained an irreparable loss in the death of his wife, who had been his inspiring comrade in all his life's work.

folk are 5s. 6d. below a bare living wage. That is the Union's strong argument on the platform. *But forty years' experience has convinced me that the labourers cannot get a living wage by Trade Union effort alone. The difficulties of organisation are so great that we cannot get an organisation strong enough to enforce it.*"[1]

As Mr. Lloyd George had refused the opportunity in March, a Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in May by progressive Conservatives, such as Lord Henry Bentinck and Mr. Leslie Scott. But it was a poor Bill with application only to certain low paying counties.

A better Bill, which was the forerunner of the Minimum Wage Part of the Corn Production Act of 1917, was introduced in the House of Commons on May 27, 1913, by Mr. G. H. Roberts. This Bill was largely the work of the National Land and Home League.

It was introduced "to provide for the establishment of a Minimum Wage and the regularisation of the hours of labour of agricultural labourers. Mr. Roberts said that according to the latest available Board of Trade Returns the average weekly wage (including allowances, etc.) of the agricultural labourer in 1907 was 17s. 6d. But that figure was based on information supplied by the employers only, and was probably an over statement. As to hours of labour it was common knowledge that in rural districts they were inordinately long. The Bill provided for the weekly half-holiday for agricultural labourers. As to wages, it followed the precedent of the Trade Boards Act. County Boards were to be set up. He did not suggest that a flat rate should be applied to the whole of the counties."

Sir F. Banbury supplied the humorous opposition to the Bill:—

"Was the honourable gentleman going to regularise the weather"? he asked. "If not, the Bill would mean that the crops would be ruined, through not being dealt with when the weather was favourable. He would also like to know if cows were to be milked on the weekly half-holiday. If there was an industry to which proposals of the kind made in the Bill should not be applied it was the agricultural industry."

This agricultural expert sat for the City of London.

A year later, April 21, 1914, Mr. Leslie Scott introduced an Agricultural Employment Boards Bill.

[1] The Land Enquiry.

The years 1913 and 1914 proved to be two years of considerable unrest in agricultural districts. In Yorkshire and in Herefordshire the Workers' Union made the most headway. In Lancashire, Cheshire and Somerset the N.A.L.U., was very active. In Yorkshire, the Workers' Union began to formulate a demand for the minimum wage of 24s. a week. Wages there varied from 16s. to 20s. for ordinary labourers, and from 19s. to 22s. for cattlemen and horsemen, plus cottages, potatoes, milk. At the May hiring, 1913, at Brigg the wagoners obtained £22 to £25. A union was formed at Scotch Corner, Richmond, called the Richmond and District Farm Labourers' Union which demanded a weekly half-holiday and overtime pay at the rate of 6d. an hour. It was stated that Mr. Harry Evans, through starting the Union, was thrown out of work, and could find none in that neighbourhood.[1]

The labourers' demand for a living wage became insistent in Yorkshire and a year later a strike very nearly took place. The Herefordshire labourers in 1913 were also murmurous with discontent. A year later, as we shall see, over 1,000 notices were served on farmers; and one can hardly feel surprise at the demands made by the men.

In the *Hereford Journal* of July 12, 1913, there is an illuminating report of a farm labourer summoned for debt. When asked by the Judge at the Leominster County Court what his wages were, he answered "11s. and a cottage." He had a wife and four children to support and his wages stopped on wet days. He got a bit of wood now and again and was allowed a row of potatoes in a field. He once was paid as much as 13s. a week, but this was without a cottage. He had never kept a pig or fowls. He offered to pay 10s. in the pound by instalments of 4s. a month. The Judge made the order but expressed his doubt of the debtor's ability to pay.

In August and September there was a revival of trade unions in Somerset and Wiltshire.

Much attention was given in this year to the dietary of agricultural labourers. Some budgets given by me in my book *The Tyranny of the Countryside*, published in 1913, evoked a

[1] *Yorkshire Herald*, August 22, 1913.

storm of protest. I received letters from ladies and gentlemen living in country houses and from quite a number of country parsons. The former were generally angry in tone ; the latter sympathetic. A lady who stated she kept ten outdoor servants wanted to know why English labourers in the southern counties who " spent their time in smoking and loafing for their 15s. a week could not live like the thrifty Scotch by making two-thirds of their meals of porridge and milk—say 3d. a day."

A gentleman writing from a large country house maintained with righteous asseveration that " 15s. a week was quite sufficient to maintain our race in a state of physical efficiency. If there is anything," he went on to say, " that is undermining the thrifty habits of the country-side people, it is the *luxurious* style of living pervading the whole community. I give you one instance : the substitution of packets of Quaker Oats, costing 7d., against good oatmeal costing 2d. Why is this ? Because they have lost the patience to prepare and boil the oatmeal ; whereas the Quaker Oats are ready at once."

This quaint insistence by the rich, that those who perform the hardest physical labour should live upon a monotonous diet of oatmeal three times a day, recalls a discussion that took place in the House of Commons towards the end of the eighteenth century on the deplorably low standard of vitality of the rural poor, resulting from the enclosures of commons and the deprivation of cottage children of milk.

When Members were making ponderous speeches over the ignorance of the labourer who preferred white to brown bread, Fox projected a gleam of humour into the discussion by asking if any Members of that House could speak with any authority on the subject of bread, as it appeared to form so small a proportion of their daily diet ?

It appeared to me as if the governing classes who live in country houses had not progressed much in real knowledge of life since the eighteenth century. A great change, however, had come over the ministers of religion. Papers theologically so wide apart as the *Catholic Times*, the *Christian Globe*, and the *Commonwealth* gave sympathetic

and wide publicity to my statements. Clergyman wrote to me to bear testimony to the truth contained in my book.

"Things are not so bad," wrote a Worcester curate to me, "as they are in other places. I know a wagoner who gets 15s. a week, and who pays 2s. 6d. a week for a good cottage; and a cowman who gets 17s. 6d. a week. From my own point of view one of the worst things about the poverty of the labourer is the absence of privacy." Here he struck a note which few are sensitive enough to sound.

The authors, however, who carried out the most painstaking investigations into labourers' budgets were Miss May Kendall and Mr. Seebohm Rowntree. After many visits to their homes to get as accurate details as possible, the veil was drawn aside and the contents revealed in a startling book, called *How the Labourer Lives*. We have had many prose poems written round Harvest Suppers. It was left for Mr. Rowntree to write the prose poem of the age on suppers of bread and margarine.

These painstaking investigators delved into the hidden mines of the dark larders of the cottagers and produced a poignant human document, undecorated by literary adornment. Budget after budget, even in 1912–3, showed how the labourer's wife was trying to make both ends meet out of weekly earnings which did not exceed 12s. to 13s., 14s. or 15s. a week. In the northern counties it showed how she managed to luxuriate upon the higher wage of 16s., 17s. or £1 a week. Budget after budget revealed the fact that in counties overflowing with milk and meat, margarine was eaten instead of butter, and that dinner consisted of suet pudding and potatoes, varied by bread and margarine and cheese. There was a Sunday joint, and occasionally during the week bacon or fried liver.

Invariably for breakfast and tea, bread and margarine were repeated with monotonous reiteration.

Nothing more completely shattered the townsman's delusion that life is made easier in the country because labourers can produce for themselves the necessaries of life, than these household tragedies written in tiny columns of pence. A number of these labourers' budgets were cre-

dited with the produce of allotments or cottage gardens, but many men who have to feed their masters' horses and cattle were forbidden to keep either poultry or pigs. In the case of one woman who was allowed to keep a pig, when asked why she did not do so she answered :—

" What's the use of hungering ourselves to feed a pig ? "

She could not afford to purchase the necessary weekly bag of meal even though that might become a profitable investment.

These budgets showed how the English agricultural labourer, instead of being the most independent, had become the most dependent of all European peasants.

It is borne in upon us with tragic insistence that it is the woman who had to bear the brunt of this unending battle of trying to make both ends meet. With daily self-sacrifice she saw that her man and her children were fed before herself, and that if there were any meat on the table it went to the breadwinner to store up physical energy to meet the demands of his master. The village belle became a worn-out married woman at thirty. When questioned as to how they managed on wages of 13s. a week, a woman answered :—

" I sleep all right till about twelve, and then I wake and begin worrying about what I owe, and how to get things. Last night I lay and cried for about a couple of hours."

Another woman, who had to eke out 14s. a week, observed :

" We've got hell here, we have. We shall get something good. But I believe hell's their place what don't look after the poor.

A Yorkshire woman whose husband earned 18s. a week said :—

" When I have seen other children in warm clothing, and mine jealous, then I haven't known what to say. I know our Master wasn't rich. We've got a roof to cover us and He hadn't where to lay His head, so I daresay it's all for the best. But they say English people ought to be strong and brave, and I don't know how they expect them—living as they do—to be strong, and brave, and cheerful ! "

" I couldn't tell you how we live," said a woman whose

husband earned 12s. a week in Oxfordshire ; " it's a mystery " (with the puzzled look of the poor at the perpetual miracle of continued existence). " I don't know how we manage ; *the thing is to get it past.*"

It was the woman who invariably raised a note of revolt. Certainly it was she who at breaking point bore the strain of it all. One of the most terrible indictments of our modern civilisation was that uttered by Mr. George Edwards, the Secretary of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union about this time :—

" In nine cases out of ten the women starve ; the first thing she thinks about is her children and her husband. As a result of this chronic underfeeding we have a very large percentage of insanity amongst the women. I am on the Asylums Committee of the Norfolk County Council and we have over 300 wives of the labouring classes under our care. I attribute this large number to the anxiety necessitated in making ends meet, and to the poor food."

Mr. Rowntree and Miss May Kendall evidently noticed the slumbering feeling of revolt in the breasts of the labourer's wives, for their volume ends with these words :—

" And yet, especially among the women, there is a slow disturbance—something that is not yet rebellion, and not yet hope, that seems to hold the dim promise of both. The waters are troubled, though one hears some very contradictory accounts of the appearance of the angel."

The authors pointed out that so bad were the prospects in 1911 that one out of every forty agriculturists decided to quit the country altogether ; that between 1900–1910 wages had risen 3 per cent. only amongst agricultural labourers, whilst the cost of living during the same period had advanced about 10 per cent., with a further 5 per cent. in increase between 1910–12 with the result that the *real* wages of agricultural labourers had actually *diminished* since 1900.

The minimum amount of wages necessary for a family of two adults and three children worked out as follows :—

	s.	d.
Food	13	9
Fuel	1	4
Rent	2	0
Clothing	2	3
Insurance	0	4
Sundries	0	10
	20	6

This estimate did not allow for any expenditure on tobacco, beer, newspapers, amusement, railway fares, postage, church or chapel collections, etc.

All families living below this sum necessary for the maintenance of physical efficiency were living below the poverty line, and with five exceptions—Northumberland, Durham, Westmoreland, Lancashire and Derbyshire—the average earnings in every county in England and Wales were below it!

"Let the reader try for a moment to realise what this means. It means that from the point of view of judicious expenditure, the be-all and the end-all of life should be physical efficiency. It means that people have no right to keep in touch with the great world outside the village by so much as taking in a weekly newspaper. It means that a wise mother, when she is tempted to buy her children a pennyworth of cheap oranges, will devote the penny to flour instead. It means that the temptation to take the shortest railway journey should be strongly resisted. It means that toys and dolls and picture books, even of the cheapest quality, should never be purchased; that birthdays should be practically indistinguishable from other days. It means that every natural longing for pleasure or variety should be ignored or set aside. It means, in short, a life without colour, space, or atmosphere, that stifles and hems in the labourer's soul as in too many cases his cottage does his body."[1]

Little wonder that Cardinal Manning, who at one time lived amongst farm workers in Sussex, said:—

"The land question means hunger, thirst, nakedness, notice to quit, labour spent in vain, the toil of years seized upon, the breaking up of homes; the misery of parents, children, and wives; the despair and wildness that springs up in the hearts of the poor when legal force, like a sharp arrow, goes over the most sensitive and vital rights of mankind. All this is contained in the land question."

A series of articles from my pen appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* dealing with the minimum wage, housing, small

[1] *How the Labourer Lives.*

holdings, allotments, cultivating waste land, and I, in common with other writers such as Mr. Roden Buxton, Mr. R. V. Lennard, urged the necessity of a legal minimum wage worked by District Wages Committees; *yet none of us, not even the Conservative advocate for a minimum wage, contemplated guaranteeing prices to farmers.* Agriculture was a sweated industry and should be treated as one of the sweated industries under the Trade Boards Act which made no provisions for the sale price of manufactured articles.

The book, however, which produced the most facts and arguments for Mr. Lloyd George's protracted Land Campaign was the Rural Report of the Land Enquiry Committee which had been instituted under the sanction of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, though the cost of it was defrayed by private individuals. The chief organisers of the Rural Enquiry were Mr. R. L. Reiss, Mr. C. Roden Buxton, and Mr. Seebohm Rowntree.

Investigators were sent into every county of England and Wales and searching enquiries were made into wages, housing, allotments, small holdings, game preserving, security of tenure, etc. When the Report was printed the Chairman of the Committee, the Right Hon. A. H. Dyke Acland, sponsored it with an introduction. In this introduction he quotes the words of an Anglican clergyman who wrote of his parish thus :—

> " The recent Small Holdings Acts are dead letters here, being completely vetoed by the power of the estate : a Labourers' Union would be an unthinkable revolution here. Labourers in these feudal villages are not regarded as people who should want ' to rise.' "

Writing of the new and growing class of landowners, the *nouveaux riches*, he quotes from Sir H. R. Haggard's *Rural England* :—

> " The new style of owner, who, having accumulated money in some commercial pursuit, buys a large estate, makes no legitimate use of the land. His, as a rule, is merely a sporting interest, and the rent being a matter of indifference to him he seeks to grow, not produce, but partridges. . . ."

And from the same author :—

"In the main, although we may not acknowledge it we look upon our land, or much of it, as a pleasure proposition in which the individual only is concerned, or so it appears to me. . . . One in a hundred becomes a small holder, one in a thousand becomes a tenant farmer; the rest who can find neither work nor outlook must perforce migrate to the cities or across the sea." [1]

Mr. Acland foresaw the difficulties of getting County Councils to act, unless men from the working classes could be sent to the County Councils and their travelling expenses paid out of the rates. He points out that he moved an amendment to the County Council Bill proposing payment of travelling expenses, but it was lost by forty-four votes.

Unless there is some radical change in the personnel of both County Councils and Rural District Councils he saw nothing for it but to increase and use more extensively the powers of central authorities.

These were some of the main conclusions arrived at in this Report:—

A Minimum Wage.—Over 60 per cent. of the ordinary adult agricultural labourers received less than 18s. a week when all their earnings from all sources have been taken into consideration, whilst there were some 20,000 to 30,000 labourers whose total earnings were less than 16s. a week.

Owing to the increase in the cost of living, the real earnings of the labourers in the low-paid counties had decreased since 1907. Low wages lay at the root of the great shortage of cottage accommodation in rural districts, and the housing problem could never be solved satisfactorily without a rise in the wages of agricultural labourers sufficient to enable them to pay a commercial rent for the house.

Many of the most energetic and independent labourers were either emigrating to the colonies or migrating to the towns.

It was suggested that the legal minimum wage should be instituted by some form of wage tribunal, fixed at least at such a sum as would enable a labourer to keep himself and an average family in a state of physical efficiency, and to pay a commercial rent for his cottage. If a farmer was

[1] *Rural Denmark and its Lessons*, by Rider Haggard.

able to prove the rise in wages had put upon him an increased burthen he should have the right to apply to a judicial body such as a Land Court for a readjustment of his rent.

Housing.—They found that the proper administration of sections 15 and 17 of the Housing Act of 1909 had practically broken down by the lack of alternative accommodation; 120,000 new cottages were needed at once in the rural districts of England and Wales, and private enterprise had entirely failed to provide them. The usual rent for old cottages ran from 1s. to 3s. a week. Against these rents no private builder could compete, nor was it possible to get District Councils to build at an economic rent unless wages rose. Thus the vicious circle went on. The Committee proposed grants-in-aid to stimulate local authorities to build. It was estimated that about 300,000 labourers lived in tied cottages.

With regard to these tied cottages, they proposed that six months' notice should be given, except in the cases where occupation of a cottage was necessary for a man employed in the care of animals, when a month's notice was considered sufficient. It should be made illegal to let cottages to a farmer for him to sub-let to his labourers.

Access to the Land.—Notices should be exhibited in every village post-office telling the villagers what precisely are their rights with regard to allotments, small holdings, and housing, and the address should be given of some Government official with whom a labourer could communicate when he wished to make a demand.

Cottage Gardens and Allotments.—Probably not more than one-sixth of the total number of the cottages in rural districts have gardens of one-eighth of an acre or more. The labourer preferred a garden of some size near his house to an allotment at a distance. Only about two-thirds of all the villages had any allotments. Most allotments in existence were utilised. Where this was not the case it was because the land was of poor quality, or too highly rented, or situated too far from the villages, or the hours of the labourers were too long to enable them to cultivate their allotments. There was still a great unsatisfied demand for

allotments on the part of the labourer. The reason that applications were not made where there was still a demand, was due to the apathy of the Council, the hostility of the farmer, the high price demanded for the land, or the difficulty of putting the compulsory powers into force through the Council. The Committee suggested that the Parish Council should have greater powers not only to acquire allotments, but also for the acquisition of village greens or common pasture ; that Parish Councils should have the right to obtain a compulsory order for the purchase of land at a price to be fixed by a Land Court. Legal costs should be borne by the Exchequer, as in the case of small holdings ; and the Parish Council rate should be raised.

Small Holdings.—There was a large unsatisfied demand for small holdings, which frequently was not voiced, owing to the fear of applying, the excessive price paid by the Councils for the land, and the rents being higher than they should be. These high rents were due to the cost of adaptation and equipment being unnecessarily large, the sinking fund being too high and included in the rent. The Committee suggested that the administration of the Act by the County Council should be stimulated by withholding grants-in-aid. That the cost of the sinking fund in respect to the land should be borne by the State ; and other proposals.

Game.—Considerable damage was done by winged game, and the loss caused by such damage is not adequately compensated under the Agricultural Holdings Act, 1908, mainly owing to the insecurity of the farmer's tenure. A large amount of land was withheld from its best use for the purposes of sport. The preservation of game to the extent to which it is now carried on had injurious social effects, which were increased by the right of search on the highway without a warrant. The tenant farmer should be entitled to kill and take ground game both by himself and by any person authorised by him. He should be entitled to snare and entrap rabbits both on his land and on the edges of his land, and not be restricted to placing traps at the holes. The tenant farmer should have

compensation for damage done to his crops by ground game coming from neighbouring land, whether such ground was in the occupation of his landlord or someone else. These reforms it was suggested would be of comparatively little value without security of tenure. The medieval Prevention of Poaching Act, 1862, which gives constables power to search on the highway without a warrant should be repealed.

Other reforms put forward in this Report concern the farmer more than the labourer, and I shall therefore omit them.

The right agricultural atmosphere having been created for him by investigators and publicists working in many instances quite detached from one another, and belonging to different political parties, Mr. Lloyd George saw the time was ripe for another series of orations on the Land Question.

A Minimum Wage of £1 a week and a Reform of the Game Laws constituted his two chief propositions. The labourers took fresh courage as their hopes mounted high. The landowners and the English farmer took fright and became as brothers. Not so the farmers of Scotland and Wales, who followed their David in order to obtain security of tenure, and the reform of the Game Laws.

Goliath, now definitely two-headed, issued its counter-blast in a pamphlet called "The Land Problem," which received the blessing of and was sponsored by both the Central Land Union and the National Union of Farmers. Goliath had become more cultivated, and sobered. It used its brains to good effect and was careful to display sympathy with the agricultural labourer, protecting him from agitators who might by statutory proposals drive him out on to the roadside seeking work!

"As to the earnings of agricultural labourers, there are no two opinions," they wrote.[1] "The broad fact is beyond controversy. The rate of cash wages paid in some agricultural districts is very low, and everyone is prepared to support any sound measures which can be reasonably expected to effect a material rise."

They criticised the statement "when the increased cost of living has been taken into account, the real earnings of

[1] *The Land Problem*, 1913.

nearly 60 per cent. of the ordinary agricultural labourers have actually decreased since 1907, " by stating, " that the Board of Trade Enquiry shows that there has been a smaller increase in the south than in the north."

Their argument that though you may establish a legal minimum wage you cannot guarantee continuous employment is of course true, but in no way militated against the enforcement of a minimum wage, for labourers had no continuous employment secured to them even without a minimum wage.

They went so far as to suggest the forming of District Commissions to *enquire* into earnings and " bring to bear the pressure of the public opinion of the district," thus instituting an irritating Paul Pry method. They made the frank admission that :—

" A country village at the present day affords scarcely any opportunity to its inhabitants of bettering their position. Men have no openings, no chance of trying their fortunes. Existence has become listless, monotonous, narrow. Something must be done to bring new hopes, new interests, new prospects into village life, if young, energetic, and vigorous men are to be attracted to the cultivation of the soil. Experience shows that higher wages are not attraction enough. *It is, without any exaggeration, probably true that a Saturday half-holiday would be a greater inducement to stay on the land than an extra* 1s. 6*d. a week.* The rural exodus is as great where wages are high as where they are low. Some other change is needed. The reconstruction of village life must be taken in hand. The labourer to-day owns practically nothing."

In conclusion they suggested that he should own his cottage and enjoy right of pasture common.

The economists now entered the fray.

Professor A. C. Pigou stated [1] that

" it appears to be the case that farm wages are sometimes kept down, in the face of economic forces tending to raise them, by what is, in effect, a species of monopolistic action on the part of a group of local farmers. The rate of pay to agricultural labourers has become a matter of tradition and custom . . . under present arrangements some groups of farmers are unconsciously playing the part of a ring of monopolists paying their workpeople less

[1] *Nineteenth Century and after*, December, 1913.

than the value of the marginal net product of their work, and holding away from agriculture labour that might, with great advantage to the whole community, be employed there. . . .

"Now, everybody is aware that agricultural workmen are exceedingly ignorant of what is going on outside their immediate neighbourhood, that their poverty is too great to allow them to hold out for long against attempts to break down, or keep down, the price of their labour, and that they are without the support of a trade union organisation. These circumstances place them in an exceedingly weak position for bargaining with the farmers—a position, too, whose weakness is further emphasised when, as is often the case, their employers are also the persons from whom they hire their houses!"

Professor Pigou suggested that a minimum rate might drive the inefficient farmer out of business, which he considered a desirable result. He seemed to fear, however, that if fixed too high the wage would attract men from the town, or from other industries into agriculture, and lead to unemployment and idleness, and a diminishing of the national wealth.

Armed with the facts brought to light by the Land Enquiry Report, Mr. Lloyd George started his Grand Tour, in October at Bedford. But here again he was careful not to make any definite pronouncement. His speech was full of the good things the labourers ought to have, but he never outlined a single Bill to contain these things. Instead, his supporters had the satisfaction of vociferously singing *The Land Song*, which no doubt cheered them to a certain extent.

"The first thing you have to do," Mr. George said, "is to deal firmly, thoroughly, drastically with the monopoly" (of land).

"Take a political map of England and you will find in the main that where the power of the landlord is unchallengeable there the wages are lowest. Can you wonder that the young labourers are flying by their thousands and scores of thousands away across the sea from such a land of mean bondage."

The campaign was continued at Middlesbrough and other places; but land remained a monopoly.

Hodge, after being told by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he ought to have at least £1 a week, grew

tired of waiting for a Minimum Wage Bill, and once more tried the weapon of the strike.

This time the trouble arose in a little known village in North Essex with the delightfully rustic name of Helions Bumpstead. The strike area was small in dimension; no great names figured in it, and the numbers involved were small, but it aroused an extraordinary amount of notice. It started, not by a demand from the men for more money, though wages were miserably small, being 13s. a week, but by the farmers' dislike of seeing so many of their men walking about with trade union badges! Four farmers, who had met together on market day at Haverhill, decided to dismiss their men unless they left the Union, which was the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. The men received notice of dismissal together with a notice to quit their cottages unless they surrendered their union cards.

To the astonishment of the farmers, not only did the men refuse to submit, but they walked off the farms, declaring that they would not return without a rise of wages of 2s. a week. Thus the lock-out initiated by four farmers developed into a strike, embracing the villages of Steeple Bumpstead, Ashdon, Sturmer, Ridgewell and Birdbrook, besides Helions Bumpstead.

The General Secretary of the N.A.L.U. tried to arrange a conference with the farmers, but they were Early Victorians and the Union was anathema to them. They refused to have anything to do in any way with a Union man, or a Union delegate. It was Lloyd George's fault, they said, for unsettling the men's minds.

Public opinion went dead against the farmers. *The Times* in a sympathetic article said that: "As a class the agricultural labourers of the country are an unorganised body, incapable of concerted action in a national strike movement, for comparatively few of them are yet enrolled on the books of the Union."[1]

Nevertheless, when the lock-out occurred at Helions Bumpstead, the farmers discovered that they were now up against a new spirit; and there is no doubt that although

[1] *The Times*, March 6, 1914.

Mr. Lloyd George had not drafted a Bill, he had at any rate roused high hopes, and a "divine discontent." This is what a special correspondent found, at any rate, in North Essex.[1]

"Helions Bumpstead," said this writer, "is certainly a milestone in this campaign. When you talk to the labourers you find that they have been roused by the possibility of a minimum wage of a sovereign, which would be riches to them. Soon after the Land Campaign started many of the Essex farmers put the wages up 1s.; but I am told that now it would be difficult even to find a farm in North Essex where the weekly wage is over 13s."

Not only were the wages desperately low, but the housing conditions were shockingly bad. Here is a description of some of the tied cottages.

"I looked into one or two of the cottages. They were neat outside, but inside one dark and damp little room, I found paper peeling off the walls, broken floors, and general disrepair. In one bedroom some pieces of sacking were nailed on the wall. The old man who lived there said they were to cover holes in the plaster. He said that one wet night recently he had to get up and nail some more sacking on the wall. Cottages are left until they become uninhabitable, and this is one cause of the shortage of labour which is being felt severely all over North Essex. Very few cottages are being built, and in some villages in the Saffron Walden Division there is a serious overcrowding. I was told of a two-roomed cottage, in one Essex village, in which twelve people are living. Another case was that of a woman who moved from a cottage to the one next door 'because she did not feel easy in it.' The day after she left it the cottage collapsed from decrepitude."[2]

Not all the farmers, though, in North Essex were mentally living in the remote Early Victorian times, for one of the largest, Mr. Cowell, a magistrate, observed to a *Daily News* representative:—"There is no getting away from the fact that farmers will have to pay more money to their labourers, and as for the Helions Bumpstead farmers saying their men must not belong to the Union, it is out of the question. They are years behind the times."

[1] *Manchester Guardian*, March 14, 1914.
[2] *Ibid.*

A remarkable letter also appeared in the Press,[1] written by Mr. James Middlehurst, senr., a farmer of Great Chesterford, who said: "Why should the labourer not form a union if he likes? What business is it of anybody but himself? Suppose he should say to his farmer-employer, 'If you do not leave your Chamber of Agriculture you shall not harvest your crops.' What would the farmer think and do?"

There was trouble also brewing amongst the 14s. a week labourers of Norfolk, the dramatic side of which was increased by the King being involved in it. But we will finish with the Helion Bumpstead strike first.

The farm labourers of Helions Bumpstead adopted primitive but picturesque methods to win solidarity in the neighbouring villages. When as the result of a ballot all the men in the neighbourhood voted in favour of the strike—that is between 350 and 400 farm workers—groups of men went round the villages at midnight and at the break of dawn rousing the inmates of cottages by bell, whistle and tin can, declaring the strike to have begun.

The chief demands of the men were now as follows: the labourer should get 16s.; stockmen 18s. to 20s.; horsemen 20s.; overtime, at 6d. an hour; harvest work, £8 for 4 weeks, and 5s. a day beyond 4 weeks; weekly half-holiday; holidays on recognised Bank holidays; and the tied cottage to be held on a three months' tenancy.

June arrived, when the luscious grass was ready for cutting, but rather than give way the farmers were prepared to lose the harvest. They imported police to afford protection to themselves whilst working in the hayfield. The Bishop of Chelmsford tried to settle the strike at Haverhill at a conference of masters and men, but the farmers refused to deal with any men who were branch secretaries.[2]

"The men have formed the Union to rebel against their masters, and I won't have none on't," said one employer, which fittingly expressed the mentality of the Bumpstead farmer. Eight men were prosecuted and fined by the Bench for leaving work without proper notice. These men,

[1] *Daily Citizen*, March 13, 1914. [2] *Morning Post*, July 12, 1914.

rather than pay the fine, accompanied by 200 comrades, carrying hayrakes, forks and red flags and singing Labour songs, marched to the Police Station to deliver themselves up. They preferred imprisonment for a good cause to being fined. The Superintendent of Police, of course, refused to take them, and once more on the march home the good people of Saffron Walden opened their eyes very wide at this motley, bucolic crowd singing songs and lifting hayrakes and forks high aloft like some decorative panel of Walter Crane's.

Though a dispute had arisen as far back as February, the strike itself lasted only about eight weeks, for the beginning was a lock-out by the farmers. Twenty-three members of the Union were victimised well into the summer and it was not till then that the strike was actually declared, involving over 400 men. And, strangely enough, a settlement only occurred on the day before the whole nation was involved in a militant strike against German despotism.

On August 3 the Federation of Farmers agreed to the following terms :—

"The Federation of Farmers agree to reinstate all men going out at time of strike. Harvest men to be paid not less than £8, other hands and these also, not to have less than 15s. per week; men not to be refused work wet or fine." [1]

This was a distinct gain for the men, for not only did it mean a rise of 2s. a week, but that wages should be paid wet or fine.

Whilst the farmers in North Essex were locking-out labourers for daring to join a trade union to better their conditions, the King was taking steps to recognise the National Agricultural Labourers' Union at Sandringham. It might be said indeed that his Majesty the King was the first farmer to recognise an agricultural labourers' union in England. This decision had far-reaching effects.

In March, 1914, there was much unrest amongst the farm workers of Norfolk and Nottingham. In Nottingham two members of the Farmers' Union granted 1s. increase to all men in their employ, whilst the Nottingham Corporation,

[1] *Trade Union Congress Report*, 1915.

which farmed nearly 2,000 acres at Stoke Bardolph and Bulcote, decided to advance all labourers' wages to 19s. and wagoners' to 22s., with free cottage and garden for both classes. The Earl of Kimberley raised his men 1s. a week in Norfolk, and so did Sir Ailwyn Fellowes on his estate at Honningham. The tenants on the Earl of Leicester's Holkham estate in Norfolk also agreed to give their farm labourers a rise of 1s. a week, which made their wages 15s.

But on estates outside those owned by these excellent landowners, wages were still 14s., and even 13s., and the men made a demand for 16s. and a weekly half-holiday. These demands were voiced all over the county.

Trade Unionism now took root within the gates of Sandringham.[1] The demand for a half-holiday became insistent, and wishing to avoid any friction, the King's agent, Captain Beck, agreed to grant an interview to Mr. R. B. Walker, general secretary of the N.A.L.U. It was then Mr. Walker had the surprise of his life. Accompanied by an organiser he took the train to Hillington station, and when he arrived he proceeded to get his bicycle out of the guard's van. The station-master, however, quickly informed him that his bicycle was not needed for the journey to Sandringham since his Majesty had sent a carriage and pair to convey the two agitators to Mr. Beck!

Wondering if some Royalist plot lay hidden behind this gracious act, Mr. Walker, with some trepidation, stepped into the carriage, assisted by one of the King's footmen. Arriving at the inn where the meeting was to take place with Captain Beck,[2] the two agitators found a resplendent lunch spread for them.

The interview with Captain Beck resulted in all men working on the King's own farm receiving 16s. a week and a weekly half-holiday. Further, Captain Beck agreed to recommend to the King's tenants that cottagers should hold their houses on a six months' tenancy.

[1] I understand all the King's men are now trade unionists.

[2] Capt. Beck's tragic disappearance in the wood in Gallipoli will be remembered by most readers.

These terms, when bruited abroad, gave rise to much heart-burning, for if there is one point of honour amongst farmers it is this: that no one should raise wages without consulting his brother farmers first in the same neighbourhood.

Viewed in this light the action of Captain Beck was most ungentlemanly! On the other hand the men regarded the action as one of long delayed justice, and "The King's Pay and the King's Conditions" became the slogan of all Norfolk labourers.

As the farmers were slow to follow the King's example trouble soon broke out between the King's tenant farmers and their labourers. The men working at the Babingley and Flitcham farms on the Sandringham estate demanded shorter hours and 16s. a week. About forty men went on strike on the farmers' refusal to entertain the King's conditions, and a hut was erected for the housing of a number of strike-breakers. The strike was quite spontaneous on the part of the men, but their Executive decided to support them and make a general demand throughout Norfolk for 16s. a week and a Saturday half-holiday.

The Farmers' Federation assisted the King's tenants by supplying them with a sufficient number of workers for their immediate needs. The moment chosen for the strike was not a good one, the spring sowing being well advanced; yet, in spite of this, the men won an advance of 1s. a week; and, as it was observed afterwards, they would have got their Saturday half-holiday had they held out a little longer.

During the strike the N.A.L.U. started a weekly journal called *The Labourer*, but after four issues, it ceased as a weekly paper. It started again as a quarterly in February, 1915.

Though apparently the men were not successful in winning all their demands, there appears to have been a general rise to 15s. in many parts of Norfolk, which was the highest cash wage recorded since the days of Arch,[1] but another

[1] It was decided at the annual conference of the N.A.L.U. at King's Lynn on March 14, 1914, to take a ballot of all the members in favour of financing a member of the Union for Parliament.

year had wearily to pass before this became the standard wage recognised by the Farmers' Federation.

The farm workers of other counties besides Norfolk were demanding better wages and shorter hours. The men of Wiltshire, Herefordshire, Kent and Bedfordshire showed great signs of a newly awakened sense of solidarity.

A strike at Trunch, near Mundesley, in Norfolk, for a shilling or two rise and a shorter working day is worth recording, because the settlement showed how keen was the growing demand for more leisure. The farmers refusing to grant both more wages and shorter hours, gave the men their choice, and the men chose the shorter hours.

However, the most surprising and dramatic rural revolt in the spring of 1914 was the Burston School Strike. This strike of the children of farm labourers was one of the links which drew the industrial and agricultural workers closer together; and illustrated the innate love of justice in the breast of the English labourer. The strike took place on April 1, 1914, in this Norfolk village close to Diss.

The reason why this strike should find a place in this history of the agricultural labourer is because the labourers, their wives, and even their children, knew that it was not the trumped-up case of the caning of a Barnardo child, or even discourtesy to the Rector's wife and the Rector's daughter, but the determination of the " powers that be " to get rid of a school teacher who deliberately set himself the task as a labour of love to organise the ill-paid Norfolk labourer and to remedy the bad housing conditions. Not only had Mr. Higdon committed these offences, but he also helped labourers to get elected to Parish Councils, to manage their own village affairs, and had thus turned out old Parish Councillors who were also school managers. In fact the whole trouble, the conflict between the schoolmaster and his school managers, began at the Parish Council Election in March, 1913. Mr. Higdon at this election was the acknowledged leader of the labourers, who defeated the farmers and churchwardens who sat on the Council, and brought about a " Labour " victory. The *Crown Inn* was crowded that night of the election, and great

excitement prevailed in the village. The news spread into other villages and circulated in the town of Diss. It resulted in newspaper men visiting Burston, and one local newspaper referred to it in an exaggerated headline as "The Burston Revolution."

It was a fitting day, this 1st of April, for the county constabulary to parade in force to overawe the children; but it was not the chattering, smiling children who looked foolish. They, arrayed in their brightest pinafores and carrying little flags, assembled on the village green and, marshalled by their mothers, marched in procession past the open gates of the Council school, which they were determined never to enter again until their dismissed and well-loved teachers had been reinstated. Rather, it was the large-limbed, blue-coated constabulary parading in front of the fearless children, as well as the school managers, the Rector, another clergyman and the Rector's wife, who looked exceedingly foolish.

It was a curious scene, full of colour and movement, which must have appeared to the detached spectator as a pastoral play with a strong element of comedy, and to a student of literature as a scene of rustic life in the early nineteenth century, rather than a hundred years later when we were on the eve of a world struggle for the defence of freedom.

The pronouncements of County Councillors, of lawyers, of managers, had been set at naught by these simple villagers and their children, who felt that their teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Higdon, had been unjustly dismissed and victimised for their championship of the labourer's cause.

On the moonlit village green, even as late as midnight with a keen east wind blowing, mothers and fathers, girls and boys, had assembled to protest against the dismissal and to decide upon future action. Parents and children had been helping by means of donkey carts and wheelbarrows to move their evicted teachers' goods to the only possible places in overcrowded labourers' cottages, that is, to empty coal holes and larders, whilst the teachers took up their quarters at lodgings proffered at the mill.

A resolution was passed that night declaring the intention of the parents not to send their children to school before justice was done.

The next morning, in spite of the ringing of the statutory bell, which rang longer and more violently than usual, the whole school marched past the school gates, with the exception of one Burston scholar, the son of a glebe-renting farmer, and three Barnado children. Thus the school forms remained scornfully empty of life. The whole village was in revolt against the powers that be.

In spite of prosecutions, fines, and victimisations the parents displayed a stubborn loyalty to the teachers.

A remarkable scene took place at the county town at Diss when eighteen parents were summoned and individually charged and fined half-a-crown for refusing to send their children to the Council School :—

"The proceedings," reported the *East Anglian Times*, "aroused a great deal of interest in the town and there was a large gathering in the vicinity of the Court Room to watch the arrival of the strikers and their parents. Preceded by a little girl riding a decorated bicycle and headed by a red banner bearing the words, 'We Want Justice' borne by a couple of lads, the strikers, who numbered about fifty, set out from Burston with their parents shortly after nine o'clock, and marched the three miles to the Court House, which is part of the Corn Hall Buildings in Diss. Many of the children carried miniature Union Jacks whilst most of them had placards on which were inscribed the words, 'We want our old teachers back, and Justice.' Several mothers were in the party with collection boxes, and their appeals for support for the strike met with a fair amount of response."

The necessary £2 5s. to pay the fines was collected on the village green on the following Sunday and the money duly paid. Still the parents held out. In a fortnight's time, instead of eighteen summonses being issued there were thirty-two, and the fine was doubled! This heavier burden of £8 was collected and paid, and still the parents held out, not for higher wages or for better conditions, not for anything that concerned them materially, but for justice to be done to the teachers.

All the villagers turned out to welcome them on their return from the Court House. It must not be imagined, though, that the children were not being educated. Their emotions being aroused, probably their receptivity was greater for the assimilation of knowledge. Their teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Higdon, gave classes when the weather was fine on the village green, and when it was wet these were held in a carpenter's shop which, whitewashed and repaired, became known as the Strike School. Inspectors, councillors, school attendance officers visited the school, found the registers carefully marked, the room warm and comfortable, and the children very happy at their lessons. The Chairman of the Depwade District Council had to confess " that the parents of Burston were but exercising their right to send their children to whatever school they liked." The Government Inspector was satisfied with the educational work being done at the school, and the educational authorities were completely beaten by this form of Soviet educational government set up by the villagers of Burston.

Naturally the question is asked how could this school be maintained without school fees, for how could the teachers live ? As the revolt attracted a good deal of Press notice, sympathisers, chiefly trade unionists, in particular railwaymen and miners, sent money to a central fund, and out of this the teachers have been paid.

But the villagers themselves, recognising the self-sacrifice of the school teachers, gave what they could in kind in the generous manner of the poor. That the Strike School should still (1920) be kept open after six years, is a rather remarkable record for a movement which was scoffed at by the authorities as all moonshine and a nine days' wonder, born on April Fool's Day.

The character of Mr. Higdon needs no defence. Since the school strike he has been made the treasurer of the National Agricultural and Rural Workers' Union, a member of the War Agricultural Committee, and a member of the Agricultural Wages Board.

An extraordinary feature of the School Strike at Burston was the notices to quit issued by the rector to three allotment

holders of the Glebe land. One of these was the owner of the carpenter's shop, who was blind. The other two attended the Strike School meetings. Mr. Sandy, the blind man, gave up his land and went away ; but the other two who would not give up their allotments were summoned and had to go to Court three times. The Judge upheld the legality of the notice, as he was obliged to do, but the men, who were typical of those who followed the plough, knew their Bible quite as well as the rector, and could interpret it better, contended that they were carrying out a Divine Law which said " As a man sows, so shall he reap." They had sown their crops, and they were determined to carry out the biblical injunction to reap what they had sown. And in spite of the rector, in spite of the ponderous law, reap their crops they did !

On Sunday, July 16, 1915, a great demonstration was held in this little village, when eighteen trade union banners were displayed, brass bands from Norwich and London played, a special train from London ran conveying hundreds of railwaymen, and 1,500 people assembled. Special constables were summoned, but for what purpose no one seemed clearly to know. Blind Mr. Sandy, one of the evicted Glebe tenants, returned to the village that day to receive innumerable handshakes.

An attempt was made to convert the school into a Council School, which perhaps would have been the wisest course to adopt. This, however, was not done, and the Burston Strike School still (in 1920) remains a successful institution controlled by a " National Committee," consisting chiefly of trade unionists, of which Mr. F. O. Roberts, M.P., is the secretary.

Strikes and rumours of strikes filled the air in rural England in the spring of 1914. Living under the grinding poverty of 12s. a week, some eighty labourers in the neighbourhood of Chitterne, on the Wiltshire Downs, struck work in February for a rise of 1s. in wages, and an hour less work a day. The strike at Chitterne was a rebuke to those farmers who are continually asserting that the men are quite contented as long as they are not interfered with by agita-

tors. Apparently none of these men were members of a union, but every man was an unpaid agitator.

With the placidity, patience, and kindliness of the peasant, the carters, though on strike, attended to and fed their horses, the cowmen looked after the cattle, and on the last day of the strike, when the South and West Wilts Hounds met at Chitterne, they joined in an exciting chase over the Down after the fox! Who can say after this that those who tie their trousers with string under the knee are filled with class hatred for the booted and spurred?

A meeting was held at Heytesbury under the historic chestnut tree. It was a dark February night. One man told the audience that he "took home 11s. 9d. and the baker wanted 11s. 8¾d. of it. (Instead of bitterness this statement raised a laugh.) He asked, what had he left for boots and clothing and everything else?

An old man whose hair was white, stood bareheaded and asked, with that pathetic love of men for their horses, how he could strike, as he had his cattle to feed. He was told he could feed his cattle, but do no more. Then some one suggested that they should start a trade union.

No animosity was displayed. They were unorganised, but the men had come to the end of their tether: they could not carry on with only 12s. a week. This tolerant placidity was too much for the farmers. They granted an immediate advance of 1s. a week to all over 16 years of age, and of 6d. a week to boys under that age.

The Workers' Union soon visited the villages in this county and made rapid strides in organising farm labourers. Branches were formed, but the farm worker very quickly learnt how impolitic it was to be the secretary of a branch when his employer refused his labourer the same right to combine as himself. At Broad Hinton, a local secretary was dismissed. Immediately, one hundred men on the neighbouring farms struck work, which sign of solidarity and discipline took the local farmers completely by surprise.

A large protest meeting was held, at which an improvised band consisting of melodeons, concertinas, triangles and tambourines discoursed anything but sweet music, for the

benefit of the exacting farmer. But the farmers stubbornly refused to recognise the Union.

At the end of February the Workers' Union held a conference of farm workers from Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire to draw up a scale of wages and hours. The following programme was then drawn up : Minimum wage, 18s. ; shepherds and cattlemen, 22s. ; hay and corn harvest, 5s. a day ; half-holiday ; hours to be fifty-four in summer and fifty in winter ; and tenants of farm-tied cottages to have six months' notice to quit.

A conference was also held at Haverhill Town Hall ; Suffolk, at which Councillor Beard presided. Wages decided upon for the eastern counties were 18s. for ordinary labourers ; shepherds 21s. ; horsemen and cowmen 22s. ; harvest money £10 for 4 weeks ; weekly half-holiday.

Another conference held by the Workers' Union was that at Hereford, where a charter similar to that of Cirencester was drawn up. The Herefordshire Farmers' Union, like that of Wiltshire, stubbornly challenged the right of the men to any form of trade union organisation, which impelled Mr. E. W. Langford, one of the leading farmers, to declare that " I am of opinion that a big mistake is being made by farmers in refusing to treat through their own Union the men as represented by their Union." [1]

The Lord-Lieutenant, Sir John Cotterell, however, granted a rise of 3s. and a Saturday half-holiday. Several other farmers raised wages to 18s., but the majority refused to make any concessions. Thus the position dangerously stood in June and even in July, when both Herefordshire and Wiltshire were rapidly moving towards a great strike.

In Shropshire, the Workers' Union submitted a scale of wages to the Farmers' Union formulating a demand for payment of 19s. a week for ordinary labourers and 22s. a week for wagoners, cowmen, and shepherds. In Worcester the N.A.L.U. decided upon a demand for 18s. a week for a sixty-hour week, with half-holiday on Saturday and 4d. an hour overtime. A seven weeks' strike occurred in the

[1] President of the National Farmers' Union and member of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1920. He paid his men £1 a week.

Wilmslow and Alderley Edge districts in June and resulted in an increase of ½d. an hour.

In the market garden district of Wallasey, Cheshire, a strike had begun on April 12. The labourers, numbering about 150 or 160, demanded 27s. a week, 7d. an hour overtime and a Saturday half-holiday. The strike lasted nine days, the masters agreeing to the Saturday half-holiday but declining to go further than 24s. a week for drivers and experienced men, with 2s. extra for drivers on market mornings and 6d. an hour for overtime. Before the dispute the average wage had been 22s. The Union in this district was still young and lacking in funds, and the organiser there, Mr. J. Phipps, considered the result satisfactory.

In June many of the branches of the N.A.L.U. in Cheshire and South-West Lancashire broke away from the parent Union and formed a new one called the Farm and Dairy Workers' Union, with Mr. Phipps as secretary, and this later, during the war, became merged in the Workers' Union.

A farm strike occurred at Swanley in Kent when a demand was made for a minimum wage of 24s. by branches of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, and in June a strike was proclaimed involving some 500 men.

In June farmers were discharging men at Whittlesford and Duxford near Cambridge for joining the N.A.L.U. "We don't want our men to be led away by agitators," they said compassionately; "if they want to come back they must ask us and they will have to come back as non-union men."[1]

In this summer of impending strikes, when farmers in every county without exception refused officially to recognise the existence of an agricultural labourer's union, declining to confer with the men's leaders, when Herefordshire and Wiltshire were smouldering with revolt, it was around a tiny village in the county of Northampton that public interest centred in the fight for recognition.

Just a handful of farm labourers pitted their united strength against a great landowner, a Peer of the Realm,

[1] *Daily Chronicle*, June 13, 1914.

Lord Lilford, who employed them and owned their cottages.

It was a conflict between the pride of the peasant and the pride of the peer ; and the pride of the peasant was nobler ; for it was less personal, being instinct with race : the fight for the freedom of all Englishmen ; whilst the other was coloured with the baser passion of repression of Liberty.

Hitherto, at any rate since Queen Victoria mounted the throne, our landed aristocracy, displaying the English characteristic for compromise, had kept out of any violent collision with their labourers. Thus by never challenging the landless to action they had made themselves the strongest aristocracy in the world. They had left it to their tenants to squeeze rents out of the bones of the labourers. But they, the lords of the soil, had always held themselves like a squadron of cavalry in reserve at the base—in reserve for the farmers. Petulantly, and somewhat ingloriously, one or two of the undisciplined of the booted and spurred had sounded a faint note of challenge from the horn in their backwoods in 1874 and again in 1909.

Now, for the first time, a noble peer was courageously heard to sound the horn, and it was on the hunting field amongst his mounted companions that he gave full cry. Every Union man was to be hunted like a fox from his hole of a cottage. Northamptonshire was to be purged of vermin.

Northamptonshire had stood foremost amongst the counties of England which had robbed the peasantry of common land, and it was equally noted for the payment of low wages.

The N.A.L.U. had been at work in the district of Thrapstone in 1913, and sixty farm workers on Lord Lilford's estate had joined the Union. In April, 1914, the men asked that their wages should be raised from 14s. to 16s. a week and that they should enjoy a weekly half-holiday. They asked for the " King's Pay and the King's Conditions." Lord Lilford agreed to give his men the much needed rise of 1s. a week, but refused the Saturday half-holiday, and the rise of the shilling a week was on the condition that the men should be disloyal to their Union. As each labourer

presented himself at the estate office for his wages, he was told he must either give his word of honour that he would not join the Union or else leave his work and his cottage. To their honour, rather than surrender an elementary and statutory right twenty-four men chose exile.

"Unless they tell us they leave the Union they must leave our employ." Thus spoke the agent.[1] And the ukase went forth to all his lordship's villages Thorpe, Thorpe Achurch, Lilford, Clopton, Aldwinckle, Wigsthorpe and Tichmarsh.

An attempt was made by the local branch secretary to settle the matter with Lord Lilford, but the attempt was not successful. Seven men employed on the home farm who refused to leave the Union were instantly dismissed, and no farmer on the Lilford estate dared to employ them. These men, like nearly all the others, lived in Lord Lilford's cottages and the branch secretary was forced to suffer eviction.

Charles Robinson, a horse-keeper, after eighteen years of faithful service received notice to leave his employment and quit the house in which he was born. His mother, aged eighty, who had spent her whole life there, was heart-broken at being turned out.

Mr. W. R. Smith witnessed the throwing out of the furniture on to the roadside in the rain. Fortunately he managed to enlist the sympathy of a farmer who protected the beds and the few household gods which form all there is of a labourer's furniture from the weather, by housing them in a barn.

The effect of Lord Lilford's act of feudal tyranny was electrical. Every workman in the county, whether he was a bootmaker or a farm labourer, felt lowered in the eyes of his fellow-men by this action. It roused the whole countryside. On a Sunday, men and women on foot and on cycles surged into the little hamlet of Thorpe from Northampton, Wellingborough, and Kettering, and in a village boasting of not more than twenty-five houses 1,000 people assembled. Speeches were made by Mr. McCurdy, M.P., Mr. Lees

[1] *Northampton Mercury*, April 17, 1914.

Smith, and Mr. F. O. Roberts, (both of whom also became Members of Parliament,) and collections were taken up through the country for the victimised men. Cycling corps were organised by the Trade and Labour Councils of Northampton, Kettering and Wellingborough. The membership of the N.A.L.U. increased rapidly and spread its influence into the adjoining counties.

In justice to the farmers, let it be here said, that officially they did not approve of Lord Lilford's action. The *Mark Lane Express*, the official organ of the Farmers' Union, on June 29, 1914, said :—

" We utterly fail to understand the attitude of the farmers of these localities. We have heard a good deal lately of the blessed word ' recognition.' Whatever it may really mean, might we point out that one weak ineffective way of recognising the labourers' effort to combine is to attempt to kill it by coercive measures ? "

The Times commenting upon Lord Lilford's attitude said :—

" To turn good men off the land merely because they choose to belong to a union, as we understand that he has done, is to adopt an antiquated attitude wholly out of touch with the current of thought and feeling to-day. He is trying to swim against the stream, which is an exceedingly foolish proceeding. The men have just as much right to belong to the Union, if they choose, as he has to belong to the Carlton Club. . . . Lord Lilford has taken the best possible course to stimulate the movement he dislikes and to justify Mr. Lloyd George."[1]

The labourers' wives encouraged their husbands to hold out, displaying that endurance which invariably distinguished their action in a strike.

As the movement spread to Raunds and other villages, inevitably the farmers were drawn into the dispute, and in July they came to terms with the men, when it was agreed that there should be 1s. a week increase wages for men, 6d. a week for boys ; 6d. an hour overtime for men earning more than 16s. a week ; 4 o'clock stop on Saturdays ; reinstatement of all men ; and withdrawal of all notices to quit.

The Union was now " recognised " all over the Lilford

[1] *The Times*, April 21, 1914.

estate—except on his lordship's farm. The seven dismissed men were never reinstated, but found work in the district. Thus the fight ended, and soon, very soon, there was another battle cry sounded both for masters and men, and it was not long before one of these men who had been fighting for freedom at home laid down his life fighting for the freedom of little nations, despite the fact that he was refused a living wage and a roof over his head in the land of his birth. The pride of the aristocrat surely was humbled before the exalted patriotism of the peasant.

Evidently the shackles of feudalism had not been severed by July 1914. But what of Mr. Lloyd George's great Land Campaign, it may be asked, with his promises of land, of higher wages, of "free" and abundant houses? In May of this year in a preface to a little book written by Mr. Rowntree [1] Mr. Lloyd George wrote:—

"More than half the wage earners in the most ancient, the most worthy, and the most vital of our industries are living on wages which do not allow them and their families the same amount of nourishment which they could obtain in a workhouse or a prison. Many thousands of them are lodged in dwellings which are damp or insanitary or too small to provide for the decent separation of the sexes.

"Future generations will ask with astonishment why this great, rich nation, nineteen centuries after Christianity began its work in the world, tolerated with so little indignation so shameful a blot alike on its religion and its civilisation. . . . The attack must be made from many sides and by many methods. It must be made with untiring energy and, above all, with unconquerable hope. Legislation cannot do everything, but it can do much, and it can do some things which no other power can accomplish. At any rate, the Government of which I am a member is firmly resolved that the strong arm of the State shall be used to obtain for the labourer a living wage, a decent house, and the right to cultivate, in independence and security, the soil of his native land."

From the clatter of political tongues sounded during this year, it seemed as if noble earls and landed plutocrats were rushing off to their armouries, to defend their old and new estates to the last ditch against the expected surging tide

[1] *The Land and the Labourer.*

of the landless proletariat. They envisaged England like a familiar old threadbare carpet of excellent quality cut up into a patchwork quilt of holdings as they had seen in France. Their minds swung back to the French Revolution and they feared that private parks even would not be inviolable.

Then to the intense relief of landowners, the Dublin riots, followed by the Ulster " rising " backed by Sir Edward Carson and Mr. F. E. Smith, now the Lord Chancellor, administered the death blow to Mr. Lloyd George's Land Campaign.

But the farm workers in Bedfordshire, Kent, Herefordshire and Wiltshire, impatient for the long-delayed act of justice had struck their tents and were on the march.

By the third week of July over a thousand notices had been served in Herefordshire by the Workers' Union to recalcitrant farmers. Strike Committees had been formed and picketing arranged. In Wiltshire the same Union was preparing for a big strike for the minimum wage of 18s., and it was estimated that 10,000 men might be involved in Wiltshire and the surrounding counties.

Then came August 4.

In tragic silence the men went back to their work and to their tents to equip themselves for a greater struggle. Their country was in danger, and to avoid discord they were content to return to the plough and work long hours for their old meagre wages, whilst thousands offered their lives to defend their country for a shilling a day. And the farmers? They, for the most part, continued to pay the old wages, worked the men for long hours and received the benefit of the steadily rising prices.

PART EIGHT

WHAT OF THE HARVEST ?

I. THE AUTUMN OF 1914.

As German guns battered down the gates of Western civilisation there was a quickening of fellowship amongst all classes in rural England. The enemy's high explosives had done what the churches and politicians had failed to do. Squire and squatter, peasant and plutocrat, farmer and labourer grasped hands during this tense moment of spiritual afflatus.

The first to leave the farms were the reservists, then, with that implacable patriotism which always distinguishes the English peasantry, the youths and unmarried men left the plough and byre to shoulder a rifle. The farmer's boy, so long despised, was appealed to by patriotic songs sung by fine ladies to defend them and all English women ; and the rich man's motor car swiftly sped these lads to the nearest recruiting station. Then it was that the well-fed, well-housed learnt with a shock the number of lads reared in country cottages, who had to be rejected on account of rupture, varicose veins, defective hearts, and bad teeth.

Then, too, it was that the man who could swing an axe, who could turn a furrow, or milk a cow, was acknowledged to be of more importance than the man who spent his days in driving a ball across a common or lounging about a Club. The squire who sat on the Bench looked for the moment with a tolerant eye upon the well-known poacher who might make a useful sniper in the ranks of the British Army.

Yet in spite of our terrible losses in man-power, and the danger in which our island-home stood of being cut off from food supplies, men still gaily rode in pink, hounds were

still fed on the best oatmeal, the gamekeeper still kept his job and the landowner still reared pheasants on the best wheat.

As autumn passed and winter wore on, the stay-at-homes who were needed to grow food, corpulent farmers and lean labourers, stood side by side in the ranks of the Volunteers forming fours. This comradeship, and the feeling amongst farmers that as labourers became scarcer they should behave more kindly towards them, as well as the common danger threatening all classes, broke down for a time that barrier which had divided them since comparative comfort had been the lot of one class, and poverty that of the other.

The quality of the education meted out to our rural democracy became strikingly apparent in these early days of the war. Maps exposed at village clubs and inns were almost meaningless to the farm workers. The treasure houses of the mind had been closed to them, and their imagination failed to grasp even vaguely the disposition of the far-flung battle line.

"Do Belgium belong to us?" asked a cowman I knew. "Is India this side or t'other of Egypt?" anxiously questioned an old man whose son had gone to the banks of the Nile.

The women, puzzled and distraught at the son or husband slipping away in the dark to some unknown bourne, were perhaps in the most pathetic plight.

Those who lived close to the sea, men who were jerseyed seamen to their waist, and corduroyed labourers from their waist to their boots, would steal away in the night on some dangerous mine-sweeping adventure, and many a branch of a labourers' union recently formed during the stressful months of June and July rapidly dissolved, and in some cases every member of a branch joined either the Army or the Navy.

The farmers were losing the services of the strong, active young men this winter, yet the step they took to replace this skilled labour was as foolish as it was mean.

Men and women were beginning to register themselves at Labour Exchanges volunteering to work on the land

wherever labour was short. But many farmers refused to avail themselves of these Exchanges, and instead, petitioned the County Education Committees to release little boys of thirteen, or even of twelve years of age from school attendance to come to the rescue of British agriculture!

The Board of Education had no powers to override the law with regard to school attendance in the employment of children, and the local authority was under no obligation to take proceedings for non-attendance if they were satisfied that a reasonable excuse had been given. The farmers who controlled the Rural Education Committees stretched this elastic "reasonable excuse" to cover in some districts children of twelve and even eleven years of age whom they wanted to employ.

Between the beginning of September, 1914, and the end of January, 1915, no less than 1,152 boys and 42 girls had been allowed to leave school,[1] including 34 between eleven and twelve and 763 between twelve and thirteen.[2]

It soon became evident that the children needed protection against being robbed of their education, whilst their natural protector was away fighting our battles in the trenches.

Nothing is meaner in our war annals than this exploitation of childhood; nothing rendered us smaller in the eyes of the world. The action of farmers, who had always looked upon the education of their labourers' children with a cold eye, we can understand; but what are we to say of "cultured" persons who presided over Education Committees and supported this exploitation with Gradgrind fervour? They displayed little exquisite sensibility. For that high quality we had to look to the man who had followed the plough—the man who was sorely tempted to stoop to this mercenary traffic in childhood—to condemn it with no uncertain voice. The National Agricultural Labourers' Union strongly protested against the employment of child-labour, and the crime for doing so rests primarily with our

[1] Of these West Sussex was responsible for 210. The Board of Education informs me that complete figures up to date are not available.

[2] *The Times*, March 5, 1915.

Government, led at that time by Mr. Asquith, who refused to interfere. The Bishop of Oxford, to his honour, opposed it vehemently, as a "disastrous reactionary measure"; and the Liverpool and District Farmers' Club had the manhood to discountenance the employment of boy labour on farms.[1]

But what can we say of the spirit displayed by some Education Committees? Take, for instance, a committee of what has always been considered a highly educational county—Oxford. A farmer at Kelmscott (oh, shades of William Morris!) proposed that "any boy may be exempted from attending school on the production of a certificate from a farmer saying that he is engaged in the production of food." As to age, he said "he would accept ten, for at that age a boy could lead a horse as well as a man." After a discussion a resolution was finally passed to the effect that the Attendance Committee of the county be asked to consider favourably the absence from school of any boy not under eleven years of age, who was temporarily employed by a farmer in agricultural work![2]

Mr. Reginald Lennard in a letter to the *Westminster Gazette* made the following caustic comment concerning this resolution: "that hunting fixtures were still frequent with the three Oxfordshire Packs, though hunting uses a good deal of labour; and that if there has been any transfer of male domestic servants to agricultural work it has been kept singularly quiet."

It is no wonder, surely, that an accident occurred of a boy aged fourteen, the son of a farm labourer, dying as the result of injuries received when in charge of two horses.[3]

I ventured to protest one day with a farmer, from whom I was purchasing calves, for employing a boy of twelve to harrow with a pair of horses. And to walk over a ploughed field is more tiring to the feet than to walk in the furrow behind the plough. He answered me shortly with the remark: "What do these little beggars come into the world for but to work for us?" He had taken the boy

[1] *Farmer and Stockbreeder*, February 8, 1915.
[2] *The Times*, January 23, 1915.
[3] *Doncaster Chronicle*, May 31, 1915.

away from school without consulting the school managers, and he said he did not care if they fined him, as it would still pay him, as he was getting the boy for 6s. a week! Needless to say, the boy's father was a cowman employed by the farmer and was living in a farm-tied cottage.[1]

This bears out a remark of a farmer at a meeting of the National Farmers' Union who " had no hesitation in advising any farmer who wanted a boy of that age (twelve) to take him, and ask permission afterwards." [2] Mr. Nunneley (a prominent member of the National Farmers' Union and Chairman of the Northamptonshire Agricultural Committee) in supporting the employment of boys at school said that :—

" hours were long, but not what they used to be. A boy's hours were perhaps from half-past five in the morning till eight. That was 14½ hours. Well, 2½ hours were taken up with meals ; 4 hours riding on a cart ; 4 hours driving ; and 4 hours waiting till the cart was emptied or filled. (Laughter.) In fact, a boy did not do more than 4 or 5 hours a day." [3]

Lord Chaplin advocated the wholesale surrender of little boys to farmers, and in doing so made the significant admission that they (the farmers) may get them, he said, " from the Reformatory Schools, but what are they as compared with the boys *living under their own thumb and known to them.*" [4]

Later, the Paignton magistrates went so far as to rule " that the exigencies of the present time override all by-laws relating to education and that a farmer may employ a boy of eleven on farm work."

These meannesses on the part of some farmers did not pass unchallenged by the Press. The *Morning Post*, while condoning the use of child labour, said the " farmer has come to depend too much on cheap and casual labour, casual because it is cheap, and cheap because it is casual." [5]

[1] In West Sussex boys over twelve were being released from school to work for 10d. a day.—*West Sussex Gazette*, February 18, 1915.
[2] *Middlesex Advertiser*, March 6, 1915.
[3] Report of a meeting held at the Shire Buildings by the Northamptonshire County Council.—*Northampton Mercury*, March 20, 1915.
[4] *The Vote*, March 19, 1915.
[5] March 6, 1915.

Canon Scott Holland in *The Commonwealth* said :—

"There is no class more terribly in danger of missing its heritage than the agricultural labourer's boys. There is no class more ready to skimp their hold upon it than the farmers. There are a dozen ways out of the difficulties in which the agricultural labourer is placed. A decent wage would bring men in out of the trades that are suffering by the war."

But it was a decent wage which the farmers as a class still refused to pay.

Mr. W. Bartlett made a strong protest against the employment of children of twelve years of age.

"It is said they will be 'only employed in light work with horses.' I have bitter memories of a personal experience of what work on farms meant to a child of twelve, and have seen others, younger and less happily placed, leading these quiet horses, stumbling up and down with weary feet over the rough clods of a ploughed field, poorly clad and not always well fed, their hands, feet, and ears covered with chilblains, shivering in the bleak wind of a March day, their eyes blinded with the tears they vainly strive to repress, a picture of suffering and child misery." [1]

Lieut.-Col. Pedder suggested that the farmers were desiring a return of the Crimean days "when much of their work was done by women at 6d. and 9d. a day and the men who got 9s. a week were lucky." [2]

Nor did resolutions at County Education Committees pass without opposition. In the Salop County Court Mr. William Latham, a miners' representative, made a spirited protest.

"He spoke as one who had been under that foul system of boy labour on the farm. Soon after he was ten years of age he was at work on a farm with a whip in his hand—thirteen hours for 6d. (cries of 'Order,' 'Order'), and the farmer at night too drunk to pay him. (Loud cries of 'Order' and 'Chair.') Could they wonder that he was on his feet, protesting? He was there to protect the lads of the agricultural workers, 90 per cent. of whom, owing to the tied-cottage anomaly and the Registration

[1] *Daily Chronicle*, February 23, 1915.

[2] In February, 1916, a case was mentioned before the Somerset Education Committee of a farmer who was offering a boy of twelve years of age ½d. an hour, with no pay for Sunday work.—*Daily News*, February 27, 1916.

Laws, were not represented on that Council. The farm labourer was tied hand and foot to the farmer. He was reminded of the saying that—

> To be Shropshire born and bred
> Is to be strong in the muscle.
> And weak in the yed.

And it is to keep these children weak in the head that they had this request for boys of twelve on the land." [1]

Few more poignant statements have been made than the passionate utterance of Mr. George Edwards at a Norfolk County Council meeting :—

"He owed," he declared, "his smallness of stature to being dragged into the fields as a boy of six years of age ; to overwork and bad living ; and he was anxious that the rising generation should not be dragged into the field and back into the old system. . . . He had followed the plough when he was ten, and he had been handicapped all his life in consequence."

Our country had not sunk to such depths of despair that farmers were obliged to call in the labour of little children of twelve years of age to help us to fight the enemy at our gates. Had they offered higher wages, they might have obtained, perhaps not all, but most of the men they wanted. Though the War Office was responsible at a later stage in endangering our food supply by a reckless enlistment of men from the land, the blame was not theirs in the winter of 1914–15. Soldier labour was offered, and strong, robust girls were eager to lend a hand ; and had the members of education committees shown the same eagerness to have their own children taken away from school as they did the children of labourers, farmers could have had the labour of athletic boys of fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen years of age. But the farmers would not pay sufficiently high wages to attract adult men ; their conservatism at first prevented them from employing strong girls of the middle classes ; and the just payment demanded by the War Office for soldier labour found no favour in the eyes of the farmer.

"The truth of the whole matter," wrote a land agent, "is that

[1] *Oswestry Advertiser*, March 17, 1919.

with the increasing prosperity that has come to the farmer of late years, little or none of this has filtered through to the labourers, who are (with all the benefits that the State has tried to shower upon them), little better off than twenty years ago." [1]

It is enough to make us as Englishmen blush for shame when we compare our attitude with that of the French nation, stricken sore by a remorseless enemy. Their circular to local authorities ran thus :—

" The existing laws on the attendance of boys at school must be maintained this year with more strictness than ever. . . . It would be disgraceful to see children robbed of their education as if the military service of their fathers had left them only the choice between beggary and premature wage-labour."

By the end of May the number of exemptions from school attendance had increased to 5,000.[2]

An attempt was made in the Press by myself, the Countess of Warwick and others to get our large Public Schools to show some sense of equality of sacrifice, but beyond the formation of holiday camps little was done in this direction. That the labourers felt that there was a class difference involved here is evidenced by a statement made by a Shropshire branch of a labourers' union.

" We poor labourers have as much respect for our children as the farmer, of whose sons there are some going to school in Shropshire at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen, and not called on to do the least little job because they are farmers' sons, and yet they are asking for ours without the parents' consent." [3]

To avoid misunderstanding, let me here say that I hold no exalted ideas as to the value of the scraps of education picked up at the village school (how could I, being a school manager?); but as every one knows it is the last year spent at school—the year between thirteen and fourteen—which counts so enormously in the educational life of a poor boy. To rob him of this year, to say nothing of the year before, is to rob him of a ripe apple after he has tasted one bite.

[1] *The Land Agent's Record*, March 23, 1915.
[2] *Daily News*, June 2, 1915.
[3] *Village Trade Unions*, by Ernest Selley.

The farmers' complaint was the lack of *skilled* labour, and yet they employed the most unskilled labour possible. One can only come to the conclusion that they did so because it was cheap.

I do not wish to indict a whole class. There were many farmers who refused to dishonour their manhood by the exploitation of children of twelve. The "cultured" classes who sat on Education Committees were more, and the Government was most, to blame, over this disgraceful episode in our national history. But unfortunately for the farmers, their Union officially declared in favour of the employment of children of school age, and as a class they were tarred by this brush. The teachers through *their* Union expressed strong disapproval of the entire scheme.

The scale of wages rose with terrible slowness in the spring of 1915, whilst the cost of living was steadily rising (20 per cent.), and farmers were beginning to experience the benefit of war prices for their produce. *The Times* said "the farmer was having the time of his life." [1]

In the north, at the hiring fairs, the hinds were engaged at rates showing a rise of 3s. or 4s. a week, with the usual perquisites; that is to say a free cottage, potato ground, or cow pasturage and a fortnight's holiday. The written agreement was becoming general in these northern counties and the farm servant insisted on the holiday bargain being set down definitely. The Yorkshire Farmers' Union increased wages to £1 a week, but in the southern and eastern counties wages remained dangerously low.

In the Braintree and Coggeshall districts of Essex wages were 17s. only. At the Dorchester hiring fair they were advanced by 1s. to 2s. weekly. Parts of Somerset had advanced wages only 2s. above the pre-war rate of 12s. Advances in Wiltshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridge, Nottingham and Worcestershire were made at varying rates of 1s., 2s. and 3s. 6d. per week. The higher rates were obtained only where the Union was comparatively strong.

[1] March 15, 1915.

In Norfolk 15s. a week became the standard rate only by January, 1915.

At Thetford County Court the Judge said that in some cases in Norfolk that came before him the agricultural labourers only earned 3d. per hour. "That did not seem to be a wage upon which a man could very well keep a family," observed the Judge.[1]

With the cost of living risen 20 per cent., the National Agricultural Labourers' Union now made a determined effort in Norfolk to obtain 3s. a week increase, which would make the minimum 18s.

In spite of the fact that we were at grips in a deadly struggle with the enemy, the farmers actually went to the length of refusing to meet the men's Union,[2] risking a strike and all that a strike entailed. Their stubbornness went so far as to compel the men to issue strike notices, and these were served in a large area of Norfolk on the last day of February. Then, and not till then, was a conference agreed upon; and this was due to a chance meeting in Norwich, of Mr. Overman (one of the best and most enlightened farmers) and Earl Leicester, the Lord Lieutenant of the County, with Mr. George Edwards and Mr. H. A. Day. Even then the farmers officially held back. However, on March 11, the conference took place at Fakenham, where Earl Leicester, Colonel J. E. Groom, and Mr. Lionel Rodwell, Mr. W. Everington, Mr. A. Keith, and Mr. H. Overman represented the employers; whilst Mr. W. R. Smith, Mr. George Edwards, Mr. G. E. Hewitt, Mr. James Coe, and Mr. R. B. Walker represented the Union. This meeting was momentous and had a far-reaching effect. It was, I think, the first time on record that a group of farmers and landowners met representatives of a labourers' union.

Mr. W. R. Smith most ably conducted the case for the men, and on the promise that all strike notices should be withdrawn it was agreed that the minimum wage should be 18s. Mr. Overman said that the spirit displayed by the

[1] *Richmond Herald*, February 27, 1915.
[2] *Eastern Daily Press*, February 26, 1915.

men was simply splendid, and that "the men did a fine thing in withdrawing their notices."[1]

Unfortunately, not all farmers honoured this agreement, which caused some men at Swanton Morley to come out on strike to demand their 18s. They marched in a body one Sunday into the parish church, where the sight of a number of agricultural labourers attending Divine Service so surprised the Rector that he walked down the aisle to ask the men if they had come to worship! The strike lasted only eight days, when the farmers agreed to pay the 18s.

Now the southern and midland farmers would have been spared the hostility and suspicion which were evinced in the years that followed, had they shown at this time the common humanity of anticipating the 25s. minimum wage which did not become law until August 21, 1917. Prices of all farm products had risen,[2] and in the northern counties of Westmoreland, Durham, Northumberland, wages in 1915 had risen to 25s., as well as in parts of Lancashire and Middlesex.

But the farmers were not to blame so much as the Government. Farmers were living in a state of uncertainty. Traffic was becoming disorganised and blocked. Supplies of feeding stuffs and fertilisers were being rigorously reduced. Farmers were losing many of their best men. Hay and horses were conscripted and it was bruited abroad that farms might be conscripted, too. They certainly had their difficulties, but this was no excuse for placing their burthens upon the backs of the children. Mr. Asquith, or Mr. Lloyd George, had he been wise, would have pronounced early in 1915, or even in the autumn of 1914, a definite agricultural policy, including a minimum wage, for which the country had to wait nearly three years. By the Government's procrastination the food supply of the nation was seriously endangered.

Those farmers who did behave well to their men did not apparently meet with the approval of other farmers. The Chairman of the Oswestry Farmers' Union, for instance,

[1] *Norfolk News*, March 13, 1915.

[2] Wheat was 56s. and oats 31s. 8d. in 1915 as compared with 34s. and 19s. 9d. in July 1914.

stated that "some farmers were enticing labourers from their neighbours by offering them a higher wage. He thought farmers would have been too *gentlemanly* to do that."[1] Certainly, farmers have generally shown a nice, gentlemanly feeling in this matter.

At a large conference of Yorkshire agriculturists at York, Mr. Furness had the temerity to say that, "they would have to give men less hours or something. He had come to the conclusion that if they could allow the men off at one o'clock Saturday until Monday morning there would be no scarcity of labourers."[2]

Early in 1915 another difficulty arose. Landowners and agents were urging farmers not to employ men of military age. Now it was estimated that up to July, 1915, 243,000 agricultural labourers volunteered for the Army and Navy, and eventually, according to the *Wages Board Gazette*, September 15, 1919, no less than 400,000 left the land for the Services. Apart altogether from the insult contained in this circular, it was a foolish policy to enlist all men of military age, as the nation soon discovered, when it needed the services of the skilled agricultural labourer on the land more urgently than it needed him in the ranks. Besides, at this time there were thousands of men working at parasitical luxury trades.

The War Office now began to offer the help of soldier-labourers to the farmers, but the War Office quite rightly insisted that these men should be properly paid. This insistence on an adequate wage was resented by many farmers, and at a meeting of Malton Agricultural Club, in discussing the schedule of rates from 4s. a day for the hay harvest to 5s. a day for the corn harvest, Mr. F. Dee, with a curious sense of patriotism, declared he

"would rather let his crops rot than accept those terms, and he moved a resolution, which was carried, that unless the pay was the same as for ordinary agricultural labourers, soldier labour must be declined."

Mr. Dee did not stand alone. Personally, I knew one

[1] *Manchester Guardian*, April 16, 1915.
[2] *Yorkshire Herald*, April 3, 1915.

or two farmers in 1915 who refused to cut their hay rather than pay soldiers 4s. 6d. a day.

On the farmers' side, it is only fair to say, that they had to put up with a number of useless substitutes, but eventually these were removed and the skilled agricultural labourer in khaki became a feature on a great number of farms; and it is undoubtedly the fact that the 4s. 6d. a day usually paid to soldiers became a powerful lever for raising wages all round. Another factor in raising wages was the 25s. a week instituted later on by Mr. Neville Chamberlain in his ill-fated National Service Scheme.

A sinister feature of the farm-tied cottage cropped up in the spring of this year. Women, whose husbands were fighting abroad, began to be evicted from their cottages by farmers. A memorable case was fought at Tewkesbury Police Court on February 4. A member of the N.A.L.U. was disabled at the battle of Mons, and after receiving hospital treatment in England rejoined his regiment in the fighting line. Whilst there, his wife, the mother of four young children, received notice that the farmer was applying for an ejectment order. The Union fought the case for the wife and won it with honours.

At the Trade Union Congress of this year a resolution was proposed by Mr. J. Coe, and seconded by Mr. R. B. Walker, calling upon the Government to insist upon the "compulsory cultivation of all agricultural land and when and wherever practicable to acquire and retain land to be worked and controlled by the State." This was the forerunner of the Cultivation Orders worked under the Defence of the Realm Act by the War Agricultural Committees; and in spite of the fact that agricultural labourers showed their keenness for good husbandry before either landlord or farmer did, very few of them were invited at first to sit on these committees. This omission, from the national standpoint, was a bad one, for not only were the skilled farm workers in many cases more intimate with the land, but they would have shown more independence in criticising farmers (those who, at any rate, were not their employers) who were neglecting to cultivate the land properly.

On August 23 the Small Holdings Colonies Act, 1916, came into force, but this I will discuss later.

Before the year was out a demand was voiced by the N.A.L.U. for a minimum wage of 25s. a week, which was the minimum being paid in Nottingham. The Scottish agricultural labourer had secured his 30s. a week by January, 1916, with meal, potatoes, and a free house; and yet in England farmers in many counties were still paying less than £1 a week, although the cost of living had risen in January, 1916, 45 per cent. In Bucks only 16s. was being paid in the Cuddington district, and Essex workers had not yet been able to secure 18s. a week; whilst in Dorset wages were still as low as even 14s. I myself, whilst staying in the Isle of Purbeck in September of 1916, came across instances of able-bodied men who were working at as low a wage as 13s. and 14s. a week!

A great stride was made in the spring of this year in Norfolk by the N.A.L.U. when for the *first time* the farmers *officially* recognised the men's Union, and held a conference at the *Royal Hotel*, Norwich, on February 19, with the result that the minimum wage of £1 per week, with overtime payment of 6d. per hour, was agreed upon for the whole county.

In Shropshire, a dispute arose this summer at the Earl of Powis's estate at Bishop's Castle. The Earl, it appears, was paying wages on his home farm lower than his tenants round him, and after serving notices the organiser secured an increase of 2s. 6d. a week, bringing the sum up to 25s., which was higher than in most midland and southern counties. Some stiff fighting, though, even up to the application for ejectments, had to be undergone before increases were obtained in this campaign. By October, 25s. per week was the common wage throughout the whole county.

A dispute at Bassingham, Lincolnshire, took place in June, during which one employer dismissed two members for daring to ask another workman to join the Union. This action was resented by the men, and they withdrew their labour from his farm. This resulted in an increase of 2s. 6d. per week.

By September the cost of living had risen 65 per cent. over pre-war costs, and Mr. George Edwards showed by publishing a labourer's budget at this time [1] that in Norfolk the men were worse off than they had been in 1914. Including harvest the total earnings were only £1 3s. 1½d.

Trouble arose in Norfolk during harvest time over the harvest rates which were agreed upon at a conference at King's Lynn, in 1915. Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P., was called in as Government mediator, with the result that he awarded a 25s. advance on the harvest rates of 1915.

Life pressed very heavily upon the agricultural labourer, especially upon his wife, in the spring of 1917. The cost of living on January 1 showed an increase of 87 per cent., and wages had risen only 42 per cent., and many other factors led to a smouldering spirit of discontent in rural districts. At the end of 1916 farmers made as much as 75s. 10d. a quarter on their wheat, 67s. 5d. on their barley, and 47s. 4d. on their oats; [2] and they made, too, enormous sums on their bullocks.[3] Furthermore, whilst labourers were asked to economise in every way, in fuel, in bread, and in meat, up to December pheasants were still being fed by hand on the best grain. That is to say, whilst they were restricted in their bread, and even cheese, which forms so large a part of a labourer's diet, they saw wheat being wantonly used in order to provide sport for the rich man. This iniquity was, fortunately, stopped in January, 1917.

But though this was stopped, the labourer felt the injustice of being restricted in his meat rations whilst the farmer or landowner could sally forth gun in hand over his fields and shoot innumerable pheasants, rabbits, partridges, hares, wood-pigeons and wild ducks.

Farm labourers, too, were now told that the pig in the stye which they had bought and industriously fed, was to count as part of their rations, at a time when they saw round about them the filling of big bags of game which went to the rich man's table. The feeling that there was one law

[1] *The Labourer*, October, 1916.
[2] *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, January, 1917.
[3] Wages in some counties were still under £1 a week in 1916 (vide *Cmd* 76).

for the rich and another for the poor was expressed in a letter I had sent me from a Hampshire cottage. I will quote it just as it was written, with its appalling lack of erudition and its sound common sense :—

"The man must deprive him self of something to get a pig in the house wich a lot mor people could do if they ware to try wich they ought to do at these times but the man that do keep a pig ought to have the benefit of it the same as the uper tens that got land and can go out and can kill Rabbits, Hares, and wild birds as they please but what I want to know is does the poor man's pig come in with the Meat Rations or not ?"

The labourer could still be fined or imprisoned for snaring the rabbit which was so destructive to our crops. It was not until later, that the County Agricultural Committees placed warreners on estates overrun with game and issued certificates to farmers or their appointed men to destroy game.

But in spite of the wedge driven into the Game Laws by an order issued by the Board of Agriculture prosecutions for being in pursuit of game continued through the whole of war time. The Government repeatedly asked every one to produce as much food as possible and to keep down all pests, and yet poor folk were still living under the shadow of the iniquitous law of 1862 which subjected them to the indignity of a search without a warrant. It is extraordinary what a difference there is between a good and ragged coat in the eyes of the law. Walking through a wood my dog ran down and killed a rabbit. I picked up the dead rabbit and carried it boldly through the wood past a row of cottages and a policeman. Though the policeman saw me carrying the rabbit almost immediately after I left the wood, I was never questioned.

These petty prosecutions angered many men, especially those who had been fighting. I remember a case before the Bench at Horsham where a discharged soldier was fined £1 for being in pursuit of conies. As he left the Court he flung out this taunt to an astonished Bench :

"If I kill three Germans I am a sanguinary hero ; now if I snare a rabbit I am a sanguinary felon."

Fortunately, sport has its lighter side, and I was very

much amused at a list of crimes presented to me by a young officer who had lost his eye and won the M.C. in France. I lent him my gun one day when he was at home on leave, and after half an hour he returned with a pheasant, saying with a smile of triumph, "I have broken the law in five places. I have shot without a licence; I have killed a pheasant; I have trespassed; I have shot after sundown; and I have committed these crimes on a Sunday."

Farm workers are quick to respond to the change in the social conscience with regard to game. They are growing bolder and more independent with their rise in status as essential food producers, and the following anecdote will illustrate their greater assertion of manhood. A ploughman well known to me was told by his mates that "Farmer John," who looked with an evil eye upon the ploughman's black dog, had said in the taproom of the *King's Head* that there was no chance of getting a hare whilst *somebody's* black dog was about. Thereupon the ploughman walked into the *King's Head* and intentionally not noticing the farmer, who was sipping his whisky, said in a loud voice: "I say, you chaps, what *do* you think I saw to-night?—such a strange thing. I saw a hare running up the road with a card round his neck, and on this card was wrote: '*I come from Farmer John's wood.*'"

Fuel was getting increasingly dear, even in woodland districts. The cottager had to pay 26s. for his cord wood instead of 18s.; 26s. for spray faggots instead of 12s.; yet he saw great logs being continually drawn out of the woods to warm the landowner's spacious hearth.

Munition factories and aerodromes had invaded the most remote country districts by 1917, and farm workers regarded with curious eyes the spectacle of men and women earning large wages to make things to destroy life, while they, who produced the food to sustain life, remained the worst paid workers of the whole community. They heeded, too, that their fellow workers in these industries were able to keep almost abreast with rising prices by means of trade unions. Thus it came about in places where trade unionism had never before taken root the feeling arose that it was only

by combination that a living wage could be secured.

In many country districts unionism had been regarded as some alien antagonistic force which increased the cost of the farm worker's coal, or of his oil, or of his boots. But the war, which dispelled so many illusions, dispelled this one too. Had not farmers, in their very presence, told tribunals that without Hodge they could not carry on their farms? There were rumours, too, that District Wages Committees were to be set up to fix a minimum rate of wages, and on these Hodge must get men appointed who could argue with the farmers; and how could that be done without combination?

In the beginning of 1917 the National Agricultural Labourers' Union asked for 30s. a week. The Farmers' Federation offered 25s. a week and as the employers and men could not come to any agreement an arbitrator was called in, who was Mr. Harry Courthorpe-Munroe. To the astonishment of both employers and men, Mr. Courthorpe-Munroe, on March 12, 1917, made an award of *exactly* 25s. a week. Naturally, this award gave rise to much discontent amongst the Norfolk farm workers. It was considered that the Government's announcement that a minimum wage of 25s. would be inserted in the forthcoming Corn Production Act prejudiced the decision of the arbitrator, especially as 25s. was to include all extras.

The demand for 30s. in Norfolk soon became the minimum demand in other counties. In some counties, such as Nottingham, the wages rose to 27s., though in other counties, such as Somerset, Suffolk and Worcester they were as low as 22s., and in Bucks even as low as 21s.

On February 14, 1917, the Trade Union Parliamentary Committee presented themselves before Mr. Prothero, (now Lord Ernle), the President of the Board of Agriculture, to submit to him the resolution passed by the Trade Union Congress held in Birmingham, 1916, which was as follows :—

"That while recognising the land problem cannot be effectively dealt with outside national ownership and control, this Congress is strongly of opinion that any scheme that has for its purpose

the re-establishment of the industry of agriculture, will be most unsatisfactory and unacceptable unless it secures to the labourer (1) an adequate wage; (2) good housing free from the tied-cottage system; and hereby requests the Parliamentary Committee to use their best endeavours to secure these in any measure or effort that may be made to deal with this question."

Mr. R. B. Walker was the chief spokesman for the agricultural labourers. In the course of a speech he said that "in certain rural parts men were even charged for buckets of water for ordinary use, and even that charge had gone up to the extent of 50 per cent." He quoted Mr. A. J. Balfour's famous declaration, that "if the owner of every insanitary dwelling was hung at his doorpost he would not weep his eyes out."

Mr. Prothero, in replying, said he could see no solution to the tied-cottage system other than that the cottage should be let direct to the labourer by the landowner and not by the farmer.

Mr. J. H. Thomas asked if an appeal could be made to the proposed Wages Boards in the case of unfair evictions. Mr. Prothero expressed his opinion that such Boards would be able to deal with those cases. Unfortunately, though, as after events proved, neither of Mr. Prothero's suggestions were effectively dealt with under the Act.

On February 23, 1917, Mr. Lloyd George made his memorable speech in which he outlined the new agricultural policy committing the nation to guaranteed prices to farmers for wheat and oats during a period of six years, Able-bodied agricultural workers were to have a minimum wage of 25s. a week.

It should be distinctly understood though that the minimum wage had no connection with guaranteed prices. As a writer in the *Wages Board Gazette* aptly observes:

"There is no real connection between the two, and any attempt to make a guaranteed price of wheat a corollary to an Agricultural Wages Board should be strenuously resisted as having no foundation in history. Wheat growing, it must be remembered, forms a very small part of the English farmers' output of agricultural produce. No minimum price is guaranteed for milk, a necessity as great as bread, for meat or for fruit and vegetables,

and yet the minimum wage applies equally to all persons employed in agriculture whether they are engaged in wheat and oat production or not." [1]

That the farmers hailed Mr. Lloyd George's speech with elation could be seen by reading the farmers' papers which were published immediately afterwards. They had been given their price for 1917—60s.—which was a distinct advance from the 42s. recommended by the Selborne Committee of 1916.[2] They would not meet trouble half way by looking at the declining figures for the following years. Mr. Lloyd George was indubitably their champion. They would forgive him all the unkind things he had said in his Land Campaign.

How Mr. Lloyd George arrived at these figures no one seems to have been able to discover. We only know that he was " assured by a farmer who is one of the most upright men I have ever met and who I am perfectly certain would not mislead the Government that on the prices we were guaranteeing the farmer on the whole he would not get much out of them having regard to all the conditions." One wonders who this upright gentleman was who had so impressed the ingenuous Premier. Mr. Lloyd George, apparently, never stopped to enquire of a labourer how much it cost to maintain him and his family in a condition of physical efficiency and comfort.

Wages had now risen generally to 22s. a week. There were instances, as in Dorset, where 16s. was the wage in January, and at Ledbury, in February, it was discovered on a farmer making an appeal for exemption for his son, that he had been paying a man who had just left him only 10s. a week. But these instances, we hope, were isolated cases.

During the summer of this year the N.A.L.U. managed to raise wages in the Thorne district of Lincolnshire from 24s. to 30s. a week. The Nottingham Co-operative Society granted the full demands of 30s. and 32s. respectively to the different grades of men working on their farms, whilst in Salop the average wage was brought up to the 25s. standard. In Suffolk, a lock-out occurred in the Darsham

[1] *Wages Board Gazette*, 1st April, 1920. [2] Cd. 9079.

district on the men demanding the Norfolk conditions. But after several weeks the Norfolk terms were conceded by the farmers.

Naturally the 25s. did not evoke much enthusiasm amongst labourers (except in those rural backwaters where wages were much lower), especially when it dawned upon the farm workers that the 25s. was to include all "allowances," even the rent of farm-tied cottages. But there was one ray of hope: a Wages Board was to be set up with equal representation for farmers and workers. District Committees were to be established under it and a higher wage than 25s. could be fixed if they had the right men on these District Committees and on the Wages Board to fight for them.

This meant combination, and here came the supreme opportunity of the trade union organiser.

Thus, during the spring and summer of 1917 an exceedingly active campaign was carried on by the Workers' Union as well as by the N.A.L.U. The leaders of the Workers' Union, Mr. John Beard, who organised agricultural labourers in the midlands in the first year of the Union's existence, and Mr. George Dallas, had the foresight to seize the opportunity which the formation of the District Wages Committees in the forthcoming Corn Production Act gave to trade unionism amongst farm workers.

They, and the organisers acting under them, realised that the new Act gave a tremendous impetus to trade union organisation. They visited remote villages in the southern, eastern, midland, and south-western counties and spread the news to men, many of whom had even regarded trade unions with aversion, that if they would only organise and secure adequate representation on these District Wages Committees they could forge a powerful lever to raise wages and shorten hours. These organisers worked day and night and put an extraordinary amount of energy into their work, infusing enthusiasm amongst middle-aged and even old men who glimpsed the dawn of a new day. With rising prices the seed did not fall on stony ground.

The war had taken its toll of young and active organisers,

which put an enormous strain upon the older men, for the life of an organiser in rural districts is only compassable by a strong, young man.

Meanwhile, the Board of Agriculture in order to obtain reliable, up-to-date information as to conditions of employment in agriculture, sent out in 1917 a body of investigators into every county under the direction of Mr. Geoffrey Drage. These Reports deserve a better fate than internment as official documents in their monumental drapery of Blue. They give us not only a bird's-eye view of men and women working in the fields, and of their cottages, but also a survey of farming in England and Wales in 1917, and are written with a literary skill which might be expected from authors like Mr. Maurice Hewlett and Mr. A. D. Bradley. One of these investigators aptly summed up the labourer's position thus :

" It may, I think, be taken for granted, since it is universally agreed that the farm labourer is the hardest-worked, lowest-paid, worst-fed and clothed, and worst-housed class of the whole British community.

" His pre-war wages did not even warrant him paying 2s. 6d. a week in rent, and, in the vast majority of cases, neither he nor his family could have existed at all but for the supplementary earnings of his wife. In having to work, the wife almost invariably suffered in health, as in spirit ; she was obliged to neglect herself, her children, her husband, and her home. Both she and her family occupy the lowest rung upon the social ladder, and they are spoken of in tones of pity, if not of contempt, by their more fortunate, better organised brethren and fellow-workers.

" The farm labourer now, as in the past, approaches nearest the state of serfdom. He is, in fact, a serf, with the privilege of sleeping under a roof which, by courtesy, is called his own, though his wages would not allow of him paying a just rent for it.

" Hitherto he has had no Union to defend his interests ; had not a copper a week to spare for contribution to any scheme of co-operation amongst his class." [1]

In August, 1917, the Corn Production Act became law. An attempt was made by the Labour Party to substitute a minimum of 30s. for 25s., but this Mr. Prothero refused

[1] *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture*, Vol. II. Cmd. 25. 1919.

to accept. He said that if he did, the Corn Production Act would soon become a Grass Production Act. I wonder if Mr. Prothero (now Lord Ernle) ever considers what a false prophet he was to his own child, for the lowest minimum fixed under the Agricultural Wages Board was 30s. and the acreage of grassland which came under the plough showed an increase in 1917-18 over 1916 of 1,806,601 acres.

The hard logic of events two years later produced the most destructive criticism of the economic theory that agricultural wages have been dependent upon prices. When the Act was passed, instituting a minimum wage of 25s., farmers were obtaining 78s. 7d. per quarter for their wheat,[1] hours were not then defined, and cattlemen were working overtime without extra payment.[2]

On October 6, 1919, when a new Order came into force fixing an increase in wages of 6s. 6d. a week, the price of wheat was 5s. 6d. a quarter less (it was 73s. 1d.), and many men in charge of horses and cows who worked about the same number of hours as in 1917 earned on an average 50s. a week, that is, exactly double wages.

Under the Act "permits" were allowed to employ a man at less than the minimum who was "affected by any mental or other infirmity or physical injury which renders him incapable of earning that minimum rate." This provision rendered innocuous the cry that a legal minimum wage would deprive old men of their livelihood.

The able-bodied men were to have wages fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board high enough to "promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation." All those, of either sex came under the Act, who worked on farms, nursery and market gardens, in woods, orchards, or osier land.

When the benefits or advantages received by the labourer

[1] Vide Average Prices of British Corn, *Journal of the Board of Agriculture.*

[2] "At Christmas, 1917, was a period, lasting three or four weeks, when little fortunes in some instances were made . . . in the fat stock market. Instances are known where as much as £50 profit per beast was made." . . . Minutes of Evidence Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1919. Vol. II. Appendix No. V.

as part of his wages were defined by the Wages Board, these consisted of cottages which were rent free, milk, potatoes, and board and lodging, and no others.

The farmers were guaranteed 60s. a quarter for wheat for 1917 crop, 55s. for 1918-19, and 45s. 1920-22. For oats they were guaranteed 38s. 6d. for 1917, 32s. for 1918-19, and 24s. for 1920-22.

Landlords were forbidden to raise rents if this part of the Act came into force. The farmers on their part were to cultivate their land according to good husbandry; and "for the purpose of increasing the national interest of the production of food the mode of cultivating any land or the use to which any land is being put should be changed."

The Board of Agriculture had wide powers under this Act: to enter on and take possession of any land which is not being cultivated according to the rules of good husbandry or growing crops required in the national interest. These powers were reinforced by Orders under D.O.R.A., which as subsequent events proved became more powerful agents for speeding the plough than any guaranteed prices contained in the Act.

The first meeting of the Wages Board did not take place until December 6, 1917. It consisted of the following members:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES BOARD.

Appointed Members.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Ailwyn Fellowes, K.C.V.O., K.B.E. (*Chairman*).
Sir Henry Rew, K.C.B. (*Deputy Chairman*).
The Rt. Hon. F. D. Acland, M.P.
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Kenyon, K.C.V.O.
Mr. C. B. Orwin.
Mrs. Roland Wilkins, O.B.E.
Mr. W. B. Yates.

Representatives of Employers.

Mr. Colin Campbell.
Mr. John Evens.
Mr. W. S. Gibbard.
Mr. R. W. Hobbs.
Mr. M. H. Holman.
Mr. S. Kidner, O.B.E.
Mr. W. S. Miller.
Mr. A. Moscrop, O.B.E.
Mr. Ivo Neame.
Mr. H. Overman, O.B.E.
Mr. H. Padwick, C.B.E.
Mr. R. G. Patterson, O.B.E.
Mr. G. G. Rea, C.B.E.
Mr. R. R. Robbins.
Mr. J. Roberts.
Mr. S. T. Rosbotham.

REPRESENTATIVES OF WORKERS.

Councillor John Beard.	Mr. Thomas Lovell.
Mr. George Dallas.	Mr. G. Nicholls.
Mr. George Edwards, J.P.	Mr. Haman Porter.
Mr. Robert Green.	Mr. Robert Richards.
Mr. J. T. Gurd.	Mr. W. R. Smith, M.P.
Mr. G. E. Hewitt.	Mrs. F. R. Toon.
Mr. T. G. Higdon.	Mr. R. B. Walker.
Mr. W. Holmes.	Mr. Denton Woodhead.

The appointed or "impartial" members were appointed by the President of the Board of Agriculture. Of the sixteen representatives of the employers, the National Farmers' Union were responsible for eight, whilst the other eight were selected by the Board of Agriculture from lists submitted to them by employers' associations such as the R.A.S.E. Of the sixteen workers' representatives, six were selected by the N.A.L.U., two by the Workers' Union, and eight were selected by the Board of Agriculture from names submitted to them by the workers. These eight were generally speaking workers selected from areas where unions were non-existent, but since their appointment they have attached themselves to one union or the other.

Amongst the appointed members of the Wages Board and the District Wages Committees, one had to be a woman, and the same rule applied to the workers' representatives. The first duty of the Board was to form District Wages Committees, which, with one or two exceptions in England, were confined to the county area. In Wales the counties were grouped to form District Committees.

No less than thirty-nine District Committees had to be formed, with representatives of employers and workers in equal numbers, and appointed members not exceeding a fourth of the whole numbers of representatives. The formation of these District Committees was not completed until May, 1918.

The trouble was to get suitable representatives on the workers' side. The farmers, who were better organised than the men, found little difficulty, to appoint their representatives; but amongst the farm workers there were districts,

especially in the north of England and in Wales, where trade unionism was still weak, or non-existent.

At this stage of the history of the farm workers we get the organiser systematically entering every county of England and Wales and making desperate efforts to find suitable men to sit on the District Committees. Organisers can tell humorous stories of how they have descended, when hard put to it, upon a man who was not even a trade unionist, milking a cow or baiting a horse, insisting upon him serving on the Committee. The part the organiser played in improving the condition of the farm worker is so great that, though I am nearing the end of my history, I feel I must devote an entire chapter to this modern product of agricultural trade unionism. That the farm worker was ready to listen to the organiser one can easily understand, for even as late as January, 1918, official investigators declared that the average wage of the ordinary agricultural labourer in sixteen counties was 25s., or less,[1] whilst the cost of living had risen 106 per cent.

[1] *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture.* Cmd. 24, p. 105.

PART EIGHT

WHAT OF THE HARVEST?

II. THE "ORGANISER" AT WORK.

NEARLY every man who has spent his energies in championing the cause of the agricultural labourer has been broken on the ruthless wheel of fortune. Though his spirit burned like a bright flame to the very last, Cobbett, was broken financially; Arch was broken; Vincent was broken; and those secretaries who attempted to organise the counties of Kent and Suffolk disappeared in the darkness of financial difficulties. Nearing the end of a long and strenuous career, the South-West Lancashire strike almost killed Mr. George Edwards, and financially, but for the assistance of friends, even he, in these days of revived trade unionism, would have been a broken man.

During the war, in the freer atmosphere of a growing spirit of independence, organisers had an easier task than their forerunners, and when the Corn Production Act was passed, not only was it lawful to be a trade unionist, but it really became an injunction upon every labourer as well as every farmer to belong to some organisation; otherwise the Act would be inoperative. No longer could any patron of a village institute, be he squire or parson, refuse with reason the use of the room for a meeting "to explain the Act." Unreasonable men of course did refuse under the plea that this was entering into the realm of politics; and it should not be assumed that the organiser was received with open arms by the dominant class. Obstacles had still to be overcome and organisers have many a story to tell showing the hostility they had to meet. In Wiltshire, for instance, which has always been a county of hard

taskmasters, a branch of the Workers' Union was formed in a village which shall be nameless. The farmers visited each of their men and told them to hand over to them their trade union cards. The men meekly obeyed! The farmers thereupon returned these cards to the office of the Union. And that, for the time being, was the end of this branch.

It may seem strange to the factory worker that men should meekly obey these injunctions from their employers, but a factory worker does not understand the isolated position, and what has been termed the "human relationship" existing between the farmer and his men. The farmer has unlimited opportunities for sapping the independence and undermining the courage of the labourer. He may follow the ploughman across the field nagging at him; he may stand about the stable whilst the carter is feeding the horses and cajole him. He may sit on the stool or corn-bin in the cowshed and expostulate with the cowman as he milks the cows, until the farm worker either throws up his job or turns down his card.

One or two humorous instances have been related to me by trade union organisers. Oxfordshire—that is to say, the Oxfordshire of low-lying fields in contradistinction to hilly country—has bred a timid race of men. Into this part of the country went two organisers to hold a meeting. As they were unable to obtain a room they held the meeting on a piece of roadside waste. They spoke to an entirely empty road and a deserted wayside green, but they were conscious that at the back of them stood a blacksmith's shop full of men secretly listening. Thus the trade union orators had the strange experience of addressing an empty space in front of them, whilst behind them was an audience craning necks out of windows to catch the words of the speakers.

As darkness fell the men crept out of their dug-out in the rear, and many had the courage to join the Union.

In another part of the county they addressed a meeting in front of a barn, whilst their listeners for the most part stood behind the barn so that they should not be visible to vigilant farmers passing along the road!

It is strange to learn that before the men on a certain great duke's estate decided to join a union they asked for his sanction. The duke graciously conceded this their right as Englishmen—even though only labourers—to protect themselves.

But the most amusing incident of all happened to a trade union organiser in Wiltshire. His rostrum was a roadside bank, and his audience lined up in extended order behind the hedge to listen. Presently a well-known figure rode proudly by. Every labourer's head immediately disappeared below that hedge as though a German machine-gun were enfilading the road, whilst the rider rode on staring hard into the face of the astonished and silent orator, erect and bare-headed on the bank.

It was during the earlier years of the war when the greatest hostility was shown to organisers. In Nottingham, young farmers, who should have been displaying their pugnacity at the Front, found a safer place for displaying it at open-air meetings held in English villages. Here the organiser was met with threats of violence and filthy language.[1] So bitter was the opposition in one village that both the Vicar and his wife came to the meeting to appeal to the farmers " to preserve the fair name of the community and the rights of British citizenship." On the following Sunday the Vicar reproached those who had acted so unfairly, declaring that " while he did not hold with all that had been spoken at the meeting, a case had in his opinion been made out for a vast improvement in the lot of the agricultural labourer."

Another incident occurred in one of Mr. Mackley's meetings at Bingham market place, where the Rector displayed a spirit worthy of Bishop Ellicott of Arch's days. He suggested in his Parish Magazine that if the Union speakers dared to come to the parish again they should have " free baptism in the rectory pond."[2] This was the kind of challenge dear to the heart of Mr. Mackley, and it lured him to the spot again like a magnet; but he found every public

[1] *The Labourer*, 1915. [2] *Ibid.*, January, 1916.

hall closed against him, and that the tenant of the market place had orders not to allow any more meetings there. He immediately announced through the local Press that he *would* hold a meeting and take the consequences, when to the credit of one religious body he was offered the free use of a schoolroom, and there the meeting was held with successful results.

I should like to say a word here as to the attitude of the clergy. The hostility shown, as instanced above, has, I think, been rare in recent years. Many clergymen to-day not only are showing their sympathy in an unobtrusive manner, but several, who are personal friends of mine, are exceedingly active branch secretaries of unions; and where they do take the lead the branches thrive with amazing rapidity.

The majority of the meetings, however, have been held not in schoolrooms or institutes, but in public-houses. I have attended a number of these meetings and have been struck with the pertinacity of the organiser, who, if he could not make the slow-moving peasants shift from the tap-room to a room adjoining, would address the men as they sat, or stood, drinking their beer in the tap-room through a fog of tobacco smoke. Publicans have become new and useful allies of Labour. It is in the interest of a publican to get a branch established in his public-house, but this does not altogether account for the sympathy shown by them to organised labour. I found that the new race of publicans who cropped up during the war have been recruited from old trade unionists, who have worked as carpenters, or railway workers, or bricklayers.

Trade union organisers visited places other than public-houses. They entered the private domains of Royalty! Before the war they had invaded Sandringham, and now in 1917 they boldly entered the gates of Windsor Castle and drew up an agreement signed by a Court functionary which gave the men working in the Royal park and farm an increase of 10s. a week. Here, every man excepting two old men, joined the Workers' Union.

It has been a complaint of farmers[1] that the men's unions have selected for their organisers railway men, miners, and other industrial workers, which makes it difficult for farmers to negotiate with them. They forget when they urge this in defence of their past aloofness to trade union organisers, that they themselves selected a schoolmaster who had been called to the Bar to act as the chief organiser of their own powerful union; an organiser who has proved himself to be exceedingly capable.

The farmers' criticism, if well founded, is one which reacts upon themselves. The unfortunate experiences of the men at St. Faith's, Lilford, Potter Heigham, and other places prove that a farm worker required a singular amount of moral courage to undertake the duties of branch secretary, and it was natural to appoint as organiser the most capable of the branch or district secretaries.

Fearing dismissal, or eviction, in many a country district served by a railway, farm workers frequently sought the help of a signalman, or a porter, who had some acquaintance with trade unionism and was usually a better penman than those who had been bred at the plough tail. Often, railway men who act as branch secretaries have themselves worked as youths on the land, leaving it for the higher wages and the greater freedom of service on the railways. Many of these men lodge in farm labourers' cottages and are as intimate with the life as the farm worker himself.

The agricultural labourer owes a great debt to the railway worker for the voluntary part the latter has played in helping to lift his fellow-worker from the mire of low wages and long hours. Indeed, it was considered before all the counties became organised, whichever agricultural union obtained the help of the railway workers first, that union was the most successful in establishing branches.

Of the leading workers' representatives on the Agricultural Wages Board, Mr. George Edwards is the most honoured. No one can say that he has no knowledge of farm life, or

[1] I have heard this complaint made by farmers at a small conference held in Lord Ernle's room at the Board of Agriculture and at the Royal Commission on Agriculture.

of the conditions under which his class lives. As a child he had known the gloomy interior of a workhouse, for his father, after fighting for his country, was imprisoned for taking turnips from a field in order to feed his family. George had never been to school in his life, being at work at the age of six, for there were seven children besides his father and mother to be kept on a wage of 8s. a week. His wife, who was his devoted companion, taught him to read, and helped him to memorise the first chapter of St. John and three hymns for the first service he conducted at the age of twenty-two as a Primitive Methodist local preacher!

Mr. John Beard, who shares with Mr. George Dallas the honour of being one of two representatives of the Workers' Union on the Wages Board, started his career in life as a farm labourer. Mr. Dallas, the chief agricultural organiser for the Workers' Union, Mr. W. R. Smith, M.P., the president of the N.A.L.U., and Mr. R. B. Walker, its secretary, have not, it is true, earned their living as farm workers; but, judging by the resolutions passed by county executives of the Farmers' Unions, these three gentlemen have been more than capable of holding their own on practical questions over which controversies have raged at the Agricultural Wages Board. It should be remembered that Taylor, Arch's capable secretary, was a carpenter by trade; and farmers have now learnt that settlements can be arrived at more quickly by dealing with men who by training can seize upon the essential points in negotiations, and do not fritter away time in side issues which a purely "practical" man so often does.

However, it is the organiser who goes out into remote places bringing men into the unions from the highways and byways, with whom we are chiefly concerned. To obtain their experiences I addressed a questionaire to all the rural organisers of the two unions late in the summer of 1919, and I have made a selection from some of the more interesting letters I have received.

"It is a great pleasure to me to know," writes Mr. H. J. Vaisey, who is organiser for the Workers' Union in Wiltshire, "that you are writing a History of the Agricultural

Labourer, or rather, Agricultural Mechanic. This matter is of life interest to me, as all my relations are working upon the land. If you go into Gloucestershire round Tetbury way and ask for Vaisey, they will ask you if it is Vaisey the carter that you want. All Vaiseys are carters except me, and I kicked over the traces. But nevertheless, I was being brought up to be a carter. My father can neither read nor write, but can plough with the next man in the county. He has been ploughing at ploughing matches since the time when he was not strong enough to turn the plough at the ends; when grandfather helped him at one end and uncle at the other in the matches. He won prizes in the boys' class, in the undercarters' class, as a carter, and then had to plough in the open championship class. He ploughed and won in the double furrow class until no one would compete against him, and was barred even from the championship class at one of the places where the ploughing matches were held.

"I was brought up to plough like father, and even got as far as to fancy my chance. When my legs were long enough to go across the horses' backs, I was put upon them. Many a time as a schoolboy I have got up early in the morning to fetch the horses in from the field for father, and have caught one of them and mounted upon his back without a halter, whip in hand driving the other horses in front of me. Saturdays and Sundays I have put in at crow scaring for a few coppers. At eleven years of age I started work in earnest with the horses. Horses are lovable animals, but their big feet used to be pretty hard when they stepped upon mine, as they sometimes did as I well remember. I remember once that I fell down over the rough land when leading four horses, and they all stepped over me with such care, that I came out at the other end little the worse had it not been for the drags that were following on behind. I was holding the plough with a pair of horses for the large wage of 3s. 6d. per week, when more often than not the plough turned me at the ends instead of me turning the plough, in the winter time, when the ends were all mud or rough land. I have been dragged round many a time under the handles of the plough, and then heard the carter shout that he would come and put his hand up against my ear, all for 3s. 6d. a week. I was riding mowing machines when my legs were not long enough to reach the footrests, and I was sitting up on the seat like a crow upon his perch, with about as much control over the horses, seeing that I had to slip down off the seat to get a grip with my legs before I could pull on the reins. This is how farmers treat boys at work. Do you remember reading the county papers 'Wanted a man, with boys preferred'? They did not want the man at all! they wanted the boys to do men's work for boys' wages.

"At a very early age I began to feel that things were not very satisfactory, and had a desire to join the Navy. When I was eighteen years of age I had a feeling that I would get into a town, and on my nineteenth birthday I set out for Swindon to look for work, with 18s. in my pocket and all my belongings tied up in a red handkerchief. Boys in a town don't know what an effort has got to be made to get away from the serfdom of the land. I trudged away like Dick Whittington to become a Councillor of Swindon, instead of Lord Mayor of London. I was out of work for four weeks and worked in the townsmen's gardens for odd shillings to keep up the 18s. I started with. At last I got a job in the Railway Works. The laugh that went round the others when they saw me with my brown corduroys on covered with plough dirt, and when I took my coat off and they saw the way my shirts were made, then they tumbled at the truth, that I came from some outlandish place where ignorance was bliss.

"The lot of the agricultural labourer was going down the hill previous to the war. Piecework and privileges were dropping off fast, and prices had a tendency to rise. I remember the time when home-bred meat could be bought for 8d. per lb. and I have bought 24 eggs for 1s. We used to go to Cirencester Mop with a few pounds in our pockets which we earned in the summer time at piecework. But the self-binder came in to tie up the corn, and the farmers left the corn to hoe itself rather than pay for its being done. Wages may have stopped still, or even rose 1s., but the allowances and privileges went, and the piecework gradually dwindled to none at all, and prices went up, while the farm workers grumbled.

"I cannot say that farm workers generally are more difficult to organise than other men, providing all things were equal, which they are not. In the first place town workers live and work in hundreds and thousands, and it is very easy to put their heads together on any matter if they desire to. If farm workers have a meeting at night, then the farmer comes round to overawe them individually in the morning while at work. If that happened in a factory, it would have to happen before the eyes of all the other workers, who would want to know what was on. The farm workers live in tied cottages, of which town workers generally know nothing of the drawbacks. Men in the villages have all the manhood knocked out of them long before they are grown men, for the reasons I have stated before, and because men cannot be produced on 14s. per week. Village influence, and village schools, are inferior to town schools. Generally, if the townsmen had the same difficulties to overcome they would be in the same position as the villagers.

"I started as organiser for the W.U. early in 1914, and I

should say that the main factors then that helped us were that the villagers thought that they had a backing by Lloyd George's campaign, and they had a further backing by the offer to them of a townsman's Union. The fact that we told the men that the Union would back them at once if they joined us, gave them much courage, and they mustered up their strength with such force that I believe we were well on the road to success when the war started. The war took the live blood from our new branches. I had one branch, which, after I had been waiting for some time for a reply for the secretary, I went over to see what had happened, and found that the secretary, president, and all the members but five old men, had gone off one morning to join the army. Times again, as fast as we got a secretary the army got him, and after making every effort to officer a branch, it would dwindle down to nothing. I have never had a rowdy meeting of farm workers, except at Eynsham, Oxon., where a butcher and a farmer's son tried to upset the meeting. If the Unions go down in the villages now, it will be the greatest calamity that could happen to the villages."

"Regarding my own history," writes Mr. Tom Mackley, organiser for the N.A.L.U. in Nottingham and Lincolnshire, "one feels somewhat diffident about doing more than just outlining a few of the more pertinent incidents in a life that never was three weeks from the workhouse door for nearly forty-five years. Born in the little hamlet of Garthorpe, near Melton Mowbray, Leics., of hard-working parents, fifty-four years ago on August 18, 1919, I have had some experience of the lot of the land worker.

"My father married twice, and all his family (six) being from his second wife, we were young when he was grey. I was the second son and second in family. My father having got his feet frozen cutting hedges in winter of 1873, and gangrene intervening, he was taken to Leicester infirmary, leaving my mother with six children, and only one working and being paid 3s. 6d. weekly. I was taken from school at nine years of age and got 3s. a week as a bird-tender, 6s. 6d. all told to keep mother and six children, not to mention the expense of my father at Leicester. My father worked on the same farm for 55½ years without any break whatever, and won the long service prize given by the Leicester Agricultural Society for Long Service the year he had to cease work. His employer got the prize-money and was going to dole it out in usual fashion until my mother threw it back at the person who brought it.

"At just turned ten years I was packed off to Farm Service, i.e. SLAVERY, and did some five years at various places. At the last place I had to clean thirteen pairs of boots, milk seven

cows and look after two ponies and then be ready to start working with labourers. However I had to go home to hold it and protect my parents when sixteen years of age, and got the magnificent offer of 9s. 0d. per week and keep myself. When nineteen my father passed away, and I had to look after a widowed mother and young sister on a man's full wage of 12s. per week, pay rent to an idle landlord, bow to the parson and go to church each Sunday and sing in the choir that famous Doxology, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow,' a mockery to me all the time, and only my love for my mother made me bear it.

"However events were shaping my future. The old employer retired from active management of the farm, got a bailiff to do it and, like many workers when put in authority proved to be a greater tyrant than his real employer. For my daring to exchange with an old man and do his heavy job whilst he did my light one I got into trouble, and on hearing the bailiff tell this old man that it was time he WAS EITHER DEAD OR IN THE WORKHOUSE, I lost my temper and knocked him down, and for that I got instantly dismissed from my work, followed by having to leave my native place and take my mother and sister to new fields of labour. I vowed then, and I have kept it, I would never again work for a farmer until I had made the lot of the agricultural labourer much better.

"From being an agricultural labourer, I became a gentleman's coachman, and whilst I had a thorough gentleman for a master, the old spirit of revolt against being a slave to others' bidding possessed me, and when he left the district I parted company with him. In the meantime I managed to scrape a home together and get married and went into a mechanic's shop as a labourer.

"I was for ten years the only member of the 'Gasworkers' Union,' now the National Union of General Workers, in that shop or town, and I paid the penalty once more by being dismissed for refusing to leave my Trade Union. When offered the choice between leaving trade unionism or my work I had to consider I had four children under ten years of age, so I consulted my wife and she decided. Her decision was I was to maintain my Union card no matter the cost, and it proved a very heavy cost, too, for it meant I walked the streets for 15 long weary months out of work, and never once during that trying period did the partner of my joys and sorrows ever complain. Only those who have been through such an experience can really grasp what that meant.

"Eventually I secured work as a drayman on a canal company, and even there the fangs of capitalism tried to bite me, but once I found a man and a brother who absolutely refused the many appeals to sack me because I was a Trade Union and Labour

Agitator. For some nine years I did my duty to that company, joined the United Carters' Trade Union and became a member of its Executive Committee and did much spade work in the Trade Union movement on the new order.

"In 1908 I was selected as I.L.P. Organiser for Woolwich, and for two years did some good work there for Political Labour and Socialism. Taking advantage of the Tutorial Class then being formed, I tried to make amends for early years in education. I attended them regularly and have much to thank a good friend, Rev. C. H. Grinling, for during that time.

"My stay in Woolwich terminated in Dec. 1912, when I removed to Nottingham where for some short time I was Secretary of the local I.L.P. Eventually I was asked, through Mrs. Bruce Glasier, to consider taking a post of organiser in the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union, which eventually I accepted. One word about the rural workers' child I must mention. I have five children. The two eldest never had any chance beyond an Elementary school education. The other three have passed or are passing through the Secondary Schools, two now hold good positions as a result and the third promises to eclipse them later on. The point I wish to emphasise is, GIVE THE CHILD OF THE RURAL WORKER AN EVEN CHANCE WITH THE REST OF THE CHILDREN OF THE COUNTRY AND THEY WILL MAKE GOOD IN AS MANY INSTANCES AS ANY OTHER CLASS.

"My work amongst the Land Workers during the past few years is an open book. In the early days I covered or visited no less than 17 counties in England and Wales. Eventually I was put down in Lincs. and Notts. At that time just one branch with forty-three members existed in Lincs. and none whatever in Notts. To-day we have in the former county about 228 real strong live branches of the Union with about 22,000 members, making it the premier county for numbers in the country. We have also done well in the latter county and still growing every week.

"Our success I hold is due to several causes, but mainly to two things outside of the militant propaganda carried on by our numerous officers of the Union, helped by many enthusiasts both inside and outside our own membership ranks. The two causes are,—(1) Education. (2) Economic Forces. The first is far from complete, but, whereas I hold that one great cause of our predecessor Joseph Arch's failure was the fact that at least 90 per cent. of the rural workers could neither read nor write, to-day there are very few comparatively but can read a printed document, even if they do not always grasp the meaning of what they read. Give the coming generation in rural England better means of education, and they will once again lead the world in progress towards the Light. The other cause is the fact that

Mrs. Hodge has found out her husband's money will not purchase as much as in the past, and she has grumbled at her husband about it until both have often got to words and finally he hears of a Trade Union meeting somewhere ; he goes to get out of her company, he listens, and the dawn of a new world opens before his vision, he joins and becomes an enthusiast, gets more and so the cause has spread, is spreading, so fast that, given the same rate of progress for another five years we shall come near the top of the Trade Union tree, and what applies industrially applies also politically. Every member of our Union is a potential Labour Voter given the chance at any and every election from the Parish Council to the British Parliament."

Mr. S. E. George, the N.A.L.U. organiser for Leicester, writes :—

" The N.A.L.U. seems to have been re-born at Fenny-Drayton in 1915 and at Empingham later, but no great strides were made until 1918-19, when the membership rose from 500 to 3,000. The Union not only brings men together, but is the means of making them discuss the cost of living, the economics of farming, etc. The men are certainly more independent ; more like men and less like sheep. The trouble lies in getting suitable rooms in which to hold meetings. We are barred from church and chapel schoolrooms ; I don't know why, for I am sure we should be more use there practising temperance than they are preaching it to teetotallers. The parson generally asks me if I have tried to get a room at the pub.

" At one place—Medbourne, near Market Harboro'—we had the use of a Church Army hut. It was purchased by a kindly-natured woman when she discovered we had been debarred from the church schoolroom. Three classes are now running for farm labourers : two dancing classes, a reading circle, and a book club, and we are going to make an outdoor skittle alley in the summer.

" I once rode with a farmer towards Melton in the train, and although a member of his own union, he absolutely denied his men the right to join their union. He said ' I am done with them directly they join the union. I keep them no longer.'

" He quite forgets," caustically adds Mr. George, " it is not he who has kept the men but the men who have kept him and allowed him to put a pile away."

In the outlying districts he finds that the men are still given a week's notice to quit their cottage if they join the union, and that it is difficult to convince some of the men

in these rural areas that the minimum wage is compulsory, though round the coal-pits and ironstone works and quarries many of the farm workers were receiving 50s. for the forty-eight hours week. He thinks it is quite remarkable that in a grazing county so many men have joined the union. He has about eighty branches to look after, each branch averaging about thirty-eight members.

"The tied cottage is an abuse," he adds, "which will have to be fought by getting workers on the R.D.C. and the C.C., and a plentiful supply of cottages at a nominal rent."

Mr. T. Roberts, the organiser for the N.A.L.U. for Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Furness, has a more difficult task to perform to organise farm labourers in rural areas where trade unionism has never taken root, and where men are not only habitually boarded, but also have to sleep with their masters. In these counties, too, the annual or six-monthly hirings have assured farm labourers of a regular wage, wet or fine.

He held his first meeting on August 24, 1918, and opened a branch of nine men at Dalton-in-Furness. He himself acted as secretary *pro tem.* The second meeting was held on a Sunday morning, September 1,

"in Mr. Dunn's cowshed, at Roos, near Barrow-in-Furness, where a branch of twenty-four stalwarts was opened. During the meeting the farmer's wife came into the cowshed to feed the calves and enquired as to 'whether the meeting was for the benefit of the farmers, or what?'"

The next meeting was also held on a Sunday morning, on the seashore, and though the farm labourers had to rush off to rescue twenty sheep which were sinking into the quicksands; and despite many of the men being wet through, they stayed to the meeting and opened a branch of eighteen.

As the Union is opposed to hiring, the organiser has a difficult task to get men to join, for it means a definite break with the farmers who insist upon the continuance of the hiring system. Though the northern farmer, as a rule, feeds his hind or farm-servant fairly well he is sometimes

a hard taskmaster, and exercises an old-world patriarchal tyranny over the lads, and even the married men, when they are weak in the powers of resistance. Mr. Roberts tells us of one or two instances of this.

"A young lad arrived at the house of our branch secretary in a certain village early one morning seeking advice, for his employer having heard he had joined our organisation threatened to take two meals a day from him and work him out in all weathers."

He knows "of a man with a wife about to be confined being engaged on low wages and damnable conditions because he knew the man could not move on," and of a Westmoreland farmer, who said to his men, when the milk was raised in price: "The kids will have to get some oot of their mothers' chests."

At one meeting the lads left in order to be in at 9 p.m., one youth leaving early to sleep in the cowshed, the door being barred at 9.15 in the month of June.

He, like other organisers, found difficulty in obtaining rooms for meetings. At Kirkby Lonsdale his meeting was broken up by farmers. At Kirkhampton the meeting being again broken up by the farmers, "a comrade Steel of the N.U.R." challenged any man to come on to the King's highway. No one accepted the challenge, although the whole village resolved to kick out the agitators. It is very rare to find an instance like this where agricultural labourers and farmers combine together to hound out an organiser.

In many of these small farms, it must be remembered that the entire work is accomplished by the farmer's family. Mr. Roberts tells us he has worked on farms in this district on an average thirteen hours a day with four hours on Sundays. "The last hay-time I put in was during a fine summer when we worked from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. for three weeks except Sundays, receiving no overtime pay, only my weekly wage of 10s. 6d. and food."

He admits that both wages and food are now better than they used to be, and that there are certain advantages in the hiring system, such as drawing wages during sickness and having clothes mended and washed.

The terrible long customary hours have been considerably curtailed since the Agricultural Wages Board came into existence. Prior to 1918 he contends it was customary to work in summer, thirteen to fifteen hours per day, and in winter Sunday's work would average seven hours.

The Workers' Union started organising Yorkshire in 1911. Their East Riding District organiser, Mr. J. A. Aldous, worked as a farm labourer all his life until 1918, when he was appointed organiser.

"I was brought up in South Suffolk," he writes, "where I worked until seventeen years of age. The workers in Suffolk at that time were receiving 12s. per week, and I, being small. was receiving 6s. and my parents had to keep me on that amount, In Yorkshire wages were then 15s.; and hired lads fourteen to seventeen years of age received £5 to £15. The hours of work were very long. In spring hired lads used to work from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. When the W.U. began to organise in Yorkshire in 1911 we managed to get leaving time on a Saturday from 5 to 6 p.m. A number of estates gave the half-day, but the farmers greatly objected. Wages rose very slowly from 1914 until the minimum wage of 25s. was established in August, 1917.

"The instant the weekly men received 25s. instead of 15s., hired lads who received £20 got £40, and casual men for threshing received 8s. per day instead of 4s.

"What the workers require most now is recreation and education. I should like to see night schools established, because in four years at a night school I learnt more than I ever did at a day school. Many a man never reads a newspaper, to say nothing of books, and is easily led astray, especially in politics. We have still to educate them that they should elect men from their own class to represent them.

"The tied house remains the curse. We have power now to get some land, but those who live in tied cottages dare not apply, never knowing when the employer is going to get out of bed the wrong side.

"One C.C. landowner said the other week that he did not believe in allotments, because if a man had done his duty he would not require any work after tea—as much as to say, if he wasn't tired he ought to be.

"Small holdings in Yorkshire have not been as successful as one would wish, owing to land being often unsuitable, too heavily rented, too scattered, and most of all, because the small holder tries to farm on the same lines as the farmer.

"In Yorkshire farmers attend all markets and sales, even if there is one every day. A good number have their motor cars, whilst many are buying their farms. The yearly and half-yearly hiring is still in operation, though a good number were engaged by the week last Martinmas."

Mr. Aldous was himself victimised for his activities on behalf of his fellow workers, and modestly refers to his lack of education, thus :—

"I am still at school, though over thirty years of age. I have not the education to write as I should like, having been a farm worker until 1918, and much time that ought to have been spent in reading was not allowed to us when we used to work on the land."

The concluding paragraph of his letter is significant, illustrating the demand by the agricultural labourer for a fuller intellectual life :—

"One thing that I have not mentioned is that a number of branches have sent to the Fabian Society for the box of books which should prove helpful."

The taunt that the organisers of farm workers are townsmen unaccustomed to farming becomes an ill-placed gibe, when we find an organiser jumping off his bicycle to doctor a cow belonging to a distressed farmer, as an incident in the following letter illustrates :—

Mr. W. B. Whittle is the district organiser in Lancashire for the N.A.L.U. "The Union," he writes, "came into being in the Ormskirk district in 1911. In 1913 the memorable Lancashire strike took place. The outbreak of war suspended trade union activities. In 1915 a new start was made and right through up to the present the growth is wonderful.

"In S. and S.W. Lancashire the minimum wage has been left behind, and at present the majority of practical farm hands are ranging from 48s. to 50s. a week, whilst in the case of first or leading hands 55s. is given. In other parts of Lancashire (notably east) wages are not so good, and as the larger parts are in the dairy interest, workable conditions are more difficult to arrange. Men are not so independent as in the S. and S.W. and naturally do not strike one as being of the same calibre regarding trade unionism generally.

"Regarding R.D.C. contests, one stands out very prominently where only last week (September) a branch secretary

(Tarbock) contested the position with a noted gentleman of means. The voting was equal. A recount occurred. Again the votes were equal. To settle the question it was decided to spin a coin, which, unfortunately (from our standpoint) came to the ground in favour of the opposite side.

" Men of to-day are certainly better off, in spite of much that is said to the contrary, than in pre-war days. Logically this is the outcome of the organisation to which they belong. Many a man to-day is in receipt of 48s. and 50s. a week who was only in receipt of 22s. 6d. and 23s. and £1 a week when war was declared. I have known agricultural labourers spend £2 in a trip in a Sopwith this summer at Southport."

Even the heavy-footed have an ambition to fly!

" Manliness is asserting itself. Men on the land are realising their importance; but unfortunately tyranny still exists. There was a case of a member threatened for being in a union in the Burnley district. Waylaid by farmers (father and son) he was kicked mercilessly and left to die. The wife started in search and found her husband torn and bleeding in a lonely road (Worsthorne). She summoned medical and police aid. The doctor pronounced the case serious. A solicitor was engaged, and the case would have been tried at Burnley. It was settled before going into court for the miserable sum of £8.

" The farm-tied cottage is the modern curse of agriculture. Men loathe the system; masters, cling to it.

" North and East Lancs, are notoriously bad in this respect and there will never be any improvement substantially until the system is totally abolished. Bad sanitation; impure water; dampness; defective roofs; are amongst the main grievances. The Fylde area is particularly bad. At Westby Mills (where I have slept myself) these facts are glaring. In the Reedley Hallows, Pendle Bridge and Cliviger districts of East Lancs. the same conditions exist and there is almost a feeling of despair amongst the dwellers. The Bolton-Bury district is similar, and as the farmer is both landlord and architect, as well as a shielded person, there is very little chance of successful appeal.

" The boon of shorter hours is a great one to the agricultural labourer. All that is needed to perfect any working arrangement is an improved organisation of the conditions. To-day hours are wasted in the conveyance of food to cattle, also lack of better arrangement for preparing same. There is a considerable mileage covered by the ordinary cattleman in connection with watering and feeding.

" In my work as an organiser my experience with farming since childhood has been invaluable. Sometimes I have posed

as a salesman for cattle drinks in order to introduce the subject for conversation. At other times I have walked leisurely along and gone into the hayfield or cornfield and assisted to load, stack or stook corn, in order to get into touch with the workmen, and introduce myself.

"On one occasion on passing a farmhouse, the old farmer, who was alone at the gate, was in great distress. Jumping from my cycle, I was informed that his three men had gone with produce to the market town and during their absence a valuable cow was taken ill. I went along to the shippon, examined the cow, procured the old-fashioned horn, and donning the mistress's apron administered a drink.

"'Whoa are yo?" exclaimed the farmer.

"'I am a Labour organiser,' was my reply.

"'Is it yo that puts men into the Union?'

"'I'm him.'

"'Well, put my three in, and I'll pay for them.'

"One of these men is a branch secretary to-day!

"One day when visiting an employer in connection with a wages dispute, the gun was taken down, but no threat was uttered. It was a rough argument, but a challenge to a sparrow shoot which followed settled the matter.

"Disputes are much more easily settled at a conference than individually, as numbers produce thought. The individual farmer is still behind the times in many ways and needs great education. The lot of the organiser is hard and entails a great deal of sacrifice. I have done all kinds of things to settle disputes; sometimes drawn "shorts" and sometimes spun a coin. My latest experience is one of being boycotted in a remote district where I could not get lodgings anywhere. One could hardly fancy such a state of things as this in these days, though one of the world's greatest Reformers had not where to lay His head."

Mr. W. T. Fielding, the organiser of the N.A.L.U. in Salop, left farm work to become a railway servant, and then returned to help those who followed the plough as an organiser. He tells me that at a meeting at Craven Arms, two veterans came forward to testify that they had been members of Joseph Arch's old Union in 1872.

"Shropshire" he says, "has had small branches in the county for about eleven years, but it was not until the last two or three years that the spirit of combination began to take hold of the workers." Writing in September, 1919, Mr. Fielding says "76 branches have been started with 4,000

members. Before the war there were not 500 members." He considers that the greatest stride that the farm workers have made has been in the shortening of the hours of labour and in the fixing of overtime rates. He finds

"The farm worker is not the docile creature he was twenty years ago. More intelligent, he has now more initiative, greater capacity, and desires a higher standard of comfort——better houses, more furniture, musical instruments, a good class of literature . . . how many embryo Miltons and Shakespeares have human society pounded back to the earth again: their latent genius and talent buried without opportunities of development!

"With regard to my own experiences as an organiser I think every organiser will agree with me that our life is not exactly on a bed of roses. We are moving about every day from village to village in all kinds of weather. With strange lodgings almost every night, and correspondence following us about which has to be dealt with under great difficulties—very often not able to secure a diet to keep one fit and well.

"We are regarded by the farmers mostly as firebrands who are bent on stirring up discontent where previously nothing but content existed. Even by the most business-like farmers we are regarded as a beastly nuisance and one that has to be tolerated."

Mr. S. Box, the Workers' Union organiser in Herefordshire is one of a family of ten, and was left an orphan at eight. He has been at work since he was nine, his schooling consisting of three years at a national school. He has been a farm labourer all his life, and before me lies a pamphlet containing verses written by him descriptive of the life of the labourer.

He says that wages remained practically stationary in Herefordshire from 1872 to 1912, when he, Mr. W. Palmer and two others began to start a union of labourers for the county. The Workers' Union came to their assistance, resulting in Mr. Box being appointed organiser.

"The work was highly successful," he adds, "but met with intense opposition from the farmers of the county. The farmers circulated a canard that Joseph Arch had collected enough money to purchase a mansion and live in retirement and had become Sir Joseph Arch. Even many labourers believed this and speak of him as Sir Joseph.

"During 1912-14 fifty branches were opened and upwards of 2,000 members were enrolled. Conferences were held, rates of wages tabulated, and presented to the local Farmers' Union, but were rejected. Still, wherever branches existed, wages rose at the rate of 2s. to 6s. per week. Where no branch existed, wages remained stationary.

"A strike was raging when the Great War broke out. The result was disastrous to many branches, the members enlisting *en bloc*. The strike was closed, propaganda ceased, and I took up work again in another sphere. I was reappointed in April, 1919, and now have upwards of 5,000 members and the membership is rapidly increasing.

"The remarkable fact was that few farmers in Herefordshire were paying 25s. a week when it became law, thus showing the fallacy that wages were paid according to the prosperity of the industry. Very few farmers pay above the minimum, and the scarcity of cottages combined with the tied-cottage system—the curse of the agricultural labourer's life—make further advances difficult.

"So cruel has been the tied-cottage system that it will be well to cite a few cases. In 1914, when the men of N. Herefordshire were standing out for 16s. to 18s. a week of sixty hours, they received lawyers' letters from their employers ordering them to quit their cottages. I have many of the original notices in my possession. In S. Herefordshire a workman who had been a wagoner for thirty years to the same farmer, was sacked for a younger man and ordered to leave his home in less than two hours. He became insane, and an inmate of the asylum for months. Another case in S. Herefordshire which occurred during the war was that of a labourer who had worked on the same farm for forty years receiving notice to quit. His three sons had voluntarily enlisted. Two of these were killed and the third returned home to see his dear old dad die a week after. In less than a week after the burial the farmer, a very wealthy man, ordered the poor old widow to quit her home to make room for a young man. The returned soldier, to save his old mother's home, offered his services to the farmer, which were accepted, but he sacrificed a higher position elsewhere to prevent his mother being turned out.

"But the Union has now taught the labourer to respect himself, and given him confidence, creating a more manly and independent spirit which will act for the good of the community."

Mr. Howard, the Workers' Union organiser in the Basingstoke district of Hampshire, writes to say that in some parts of his district 90 per cent. of the men are organised and that

the labourers have about forty representatives in Parish and Rural District Councils, though the district is undefined. He finds that on large farms the men are "more independent and more prepared to insist on their rights than on small farms."

"I have recently," he adds, "been endeavouring to get all cottages examined by the District Wages Committee in view of getting the rent of 3s. reduced where cottages are in a bad state. I got more opposition from farmers on this than on any other question, but we have been successful in getting rents reduced in bad cases. The tied house is the thing that to-day is preventing men from being independent, as they are afraid of being turned out into the road.

"I know of a case near Alton where a man knowingly agreed that his son should work at a lower rate than the minimum because he was afraid of being turned out. This he admitted only when he left his situation through a quarrel. He said it was a common practice to do this where a man had one or two sons, and that they do not complain, because of the housing difficulty. Some farmers deduct from each employee living in the same cottage the 3s. a week for rent. I have known 9s. deducted in this way at one cottage. We got two cases settled in favour of the men. Owing to years of oppression the rural mind is less receptive than that of most workers."

Mr. G. C. Piggott, the Isle of Wight and Hants organiser of the N.A.L.U., tells me of the curious way in which he became an organiser :—

"With regard to the birth of our union in the Isle of Wight it was brought about in this way. My late employer had been to London as the representative to the Central Chamber of Agriculture and I had to meet him at the station on his return. On his way home he kept on telling me what *they* were going to do and what *they* were not going to do, and I said, 'What is wanted is an Agricultural Labourers' Union in this district, and I'm going to try and get one.' He said 'I agree with you,' and I immediately set to work. I got two dock workers from Cowes to speak, and we started our first branch at Newport with forty-seven members. That was on January 12, 1918, That branch is now 257 strong, and there are altogether fourteen branches on the island with a total of over 1,000 members."

Farmers continually complain that the objection to a trade union rate of wages is that you have to pay all men alike. This of course is not true, (except in so far as

a minimum has to be paid), and Mr. Piggott gives an amusing instance of how a man who had always been paid 5s. a week more than the other workmen on the farm demanded the extra sum when the minimum wage was fixed—and got it!

Before the war Mr. Piggott was working for a farmer for £1 a week with a cottage, and he worked for this wage right up to 1915, when he had a wife and five children under eight years of age to support. His work started at five o'clock in the morning and ceased only at the pleasure of the farmer, without a penny being paid for overtime.

"I have known the time when I have been cutting up mangolds on Saturday night up till ten o'clock so that I should not do this on Sunday. On one occasion we had a cow bad, and I sat up with her nearly all night. When I asked for some payment for this, my employer replied, 'I lost the cow.' I was told I could have separated milk free, but he never failed to remind me of this act of generosity afterwards."

Like all other organisers he condemns the tied-cottage system. To illustrate the ceaseless drudgery of farm work he writes:

"I have just had a farm labourer, one of my old mates, staying with me. He is 35 years of age, and this is the first holiday he has had for ten years. Another one wrote me a few weeks ago to say that he had drawn all his harvest pay and was now going to spend it. This was the first holiday he had ever had, and he was going to London. Fancy Hodge in London! It would be good material for your book."

I wonder what the effect would have been amongst the Brotherhood of Thackeray's days who possessed fine calves and wore yellow plushes if they knew that a footman was destined to become one of the most successful organisers of the agricultural labourers? You could not shock a footman to-day by such an announcement if one is to judge the fraternity by a visit I paid during war-time to an exceedingly exclusive club in St. James' Street. Here I handed my card to a white-haired gentleman arrayed in spotless linen who might have been the family butler to

the distinguished Peer upon whom I was calling. My astonishment was great when this very respectable elderly waiter asked me in a voice audible to others if I knew if his lordship paid good wages to farm workers. I answered that I hoped so. Thereupon he burst out with: "It's about time they did. My father was an agricultural labourer and he had to bring nine of us up on 10s. a week." He said it with such feeling that I felt that if I had put a Red Flag into his hand he would have rushed out into the street heralding the Social Revolution!

Mr. Jack Shingfield, the Workers' Union organiser of the farm labourers in Suffolk, was at one time a footman. His father was a farm labourer and a member of Joseph Arch's Union. Jack left school at eleven years of age, when he worked in the gardens attached to a castle. As his calves developed it was but a short flight of steps into the servants' hall; and he took his calves in the wake of a sporting gentleman on to the hunting fields, the grouse moors and the deck of a yacht.

Bored with this parasitical kind of labour, and throwing respectability to the winds, he became a London dairyman, and soon agitated to improve conditions for his fellow workers, forming what was then known as the National Union of Dairy Employees. Despite his twelve hours a day for seven days a week, he attended classes at the Polytechnic and secured diplomas. At the beginning of the war he was fired with the desire to organise the class from which he had sprung, and he was appointed an eastern counties organiser for the Workers' Union.

Under forty years of age, he is still young, and his energy found a boundless field in Suffolk and in Essex, where since his appointment as organiser in 1915 he has opened 200 new branches with a membership of nearly 30,000. He organised one of the largest and most successful farm labourers' demonstrations ever held in England. This was at Bury St. Edmunds, when it was estimated that 20,000 men were present (June, 1919).

Mr. Shingfield believes in plain language when speaking to labourers, and as an organiser, in giving simple directions

even as to the smallest details to men who are unaccustomed to print.

"I have long ago discovered," he writes, "that you have got to lead the farm worker; tell him what he has to do and he will do it to a man. But leave it to him to think it out for himself and you won't get much response. Just tell him what you want, and tell him plain and straight, and he will be with you. It's his class-consciousness that you want to discover. It is there, though it is difficult to find. I know, because I am one of them and have felt the stifling, stunting atmosphere of the great estate."

Though Mr. Shingfield is a member of the District Wages Committee, he has found it necessary to institute a standing joint council of the Farmers' Union and the Workers' Union, which has done very useful work in settling disputes as to the tenancy of cottages, victimisation, and the non-payment of the minimum wage. By avoiding sending reports to the Agricultural Wages Board and the consequent visitation of an inspector (which often results in the labourer being dismissed) this Council, by frank discussion, has prevented a good deal of friction between the farmers and the workers.

Of the new school of organisers similar to that of Mr. Shingfield belongs Mr. Harry White, the Workers' Union organiser for the county of Bedford. The two men are quite dissimilar in character and temperament; but both are sons of farm labourers and being deprived of education at an early age they sought knowledge where the poor man only can gain it, that is in the towns. Mr. White's father worked in the Bedfordshire village of Leagrave, seven days a week for 12s. a week. Harry was the second of a family of eight. He left school at 11½ years of age, being driven to increase the family earnings by 2s. 6d. a week as carter's boy.

At the first opportunity he abandoned this life to become an errand boy to a firm of straw hat manufacturers. At seventeen he began to take a keen interest in social and political problems, joined an adult school in the village and became a convinced socialist. Two years later, at the age of nineteen, he, with one or two others, gave his village a profound shock by opening a branch of the I.L.P. He soon

came into touch with the Workers' Educational Association, being one of the first members to join the Luton tutorial class. He attended these classes for four years, walking six miles after his factory work ended.

In 1911 he moved to Luton, and there when Alderman Morley opened a branch of the Workers' Union he joined it, and in 1914 became branch secretary. In 1915 he was appointed organiser in Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties. Since he took this work in hand the membership increased from 1,000 to 15,000 in the space of four years. Like most organisers who belong to the "advanced" movement he is a tactful negotiator, displaying this gift with success when he handled the Chatteris strike, with which I will deal later.

Writing to me of the social conditions at Ridgmount, which is in the centre of the Duke of Bedford's estate, he says :—

"It was in the autumn of 1917 when I tried to fix up a meeting but could not get a room for some time. Then a friendly publican offered the use of a room and we opened a small branch with the publican as secretary. Since that time quite a transformation has taken place. Our membership has grown to about 250 and the old influence has gone, as is proved by the fact that at the last Parish Council all its successful candidates were members of our Union!"

There are other organisers as able and successful as these I have mentioned, but their replies have not reached me in time for publication. Yet there is one other letter from which I should like to quote, and this comes not from an organiser, but from a branch secretary still working as a farm labourer.

This poignant human document, consisting of thirty-one pages of closely written clear handwriting, was sent to me by the writer last autumn. It was the record of the life of a farm labourer in Sussex, and is written by the man himself. Considering how loth men who handle the plough are to put pen to paper, one can imagine the nights this man has spent of his scanty leisure laboriously penning the salient facts of his life. Unfortunately I have space only to include extracts.

" Born in the year 1873," he writes, " my father was a carter at Brede in the county of Sussex. Before my birth there were in the family two boys and one girl. My father's wage was 15s. per week with his cottage, then out of that his employer stopped 1s. per week for the firing, so that left 14s. to keep my father, mother, and the three little ones, and then, of course, there arrived myself to increase the family. *Unfortunately, I lived to add to their great burden.* Then another girl was born, which like myself lived and had to be kept, on the same wage, and after her two others, making a family of nine living upon 14s.

" When I was attending school *a stroke of luck* fell upon my father. His employer wanted a carter's boy for 4s. a week, so of course my brother started work with the horses, not because he had had sufficient schooling, but because his 4s. were wanted to make ends meet in the home. He was out in the stable in the morning by six to go either to Rye or Hastings, and as there was no compulsory school attendance in those days I often went with my father and brother for a ride in the wagon, and I cannot tell you how I enjoyed those rides along the Udimore Road on the starlight mornings in the winter !

" Whilst I was attending school in this kind of way my mother fell ill, and the cottage where we lived, like many others, had no water close to it—the nearest being about two furlongs from the house—so again I kept away from school, for on the day my mother did the washing I used to be at home to fetch the water with two small buckets.

" I loved my mother so much that I felt I must always be with her, but how she managed to make ends meet God only knows. Often at dinner I have seen the tears come in her eyes when father asked her if she could not eat more dinner and her answer was, ' I must think of those who go to work and the children,' and often I am sure she has gone short of food through thought of the children.

" *Another stroke of luck* though fell to the home, when my eldest sister was old enough to go to service ; but the struggle was no less as those at home still grew older and wanted more to eat ; but the wage of my father never grew.

" My mother, though often ill, had to go to work in the field and hop-garden to help support the home. When my father had worked at that farm for nearly nine years my mother's illness led to calling in the doctor, who told my father that if he wished to save my mother's life he must get a better house. So on Monday, February 25, 1884, my father heard of another situation. It was a lovely, clear day, and as it was mother's washing day I was at home fetching water and seeing to the fire, and my father, as he sat at dinner, said he was going, as

soon as he got the horses in the stables, to Udimore to see about another situation.

"The home was made clean and as comfortable as circumstances would allow, and my mother got herself dressed with the intention of visiting a friend, but she complained of feeling so tired and said she must rest awhile. So she made herself comfortable upon the sofa, and there, on that lovely bright afternoon, on February 25, 1884, she passed away.

"My father got his situation, not realising the news that was awaiting him on his return. His old employer to show his appreciation of my father's nine years' service offered, free of charge, one of his manure carts to carry all that remained of a loving mother to the church.

"I may say that just before that time, there was in existence a union known as the Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union, of which my father and a few others in Brede were members; but not being far enough of years off the Peterloo slaughter it had to be kept pretty secret, and whether it got to the knowledge of the employer or not one cannot say, but if it did, that was no doubt the reason of him offering so respectable a conveyance to convey my mother to the church, though my father worked very long hours, receiving no pay for overtime.

"We moved to Udimore, and I, though not twelve years of age, was compelled to leave school to help to maintain the home on a wage of 3s. a week, getting to the stable in the morning at half-past six and not leaving till the evening. The ordinary labourer's wage was then 12s. a week, losing time on wet days. I worked for 3s. a week for two years and then made up my mind to ask for more money, as I was over thirteen years of age. But all that I was told by master was that he thought of lowering wages. That was the cause of my father in 1887 leaving Udimore to go to Westfield.

"At that time, about 1886, there was a talk of raising the wages from 2s. to 2s. 3d. a day, and the farmers said that if the wages did go up 3d. a day they would lay their land down to grass. Some of the Sussex farmers openly said it was a pity men were not like mangolds, that they could be buried in the autumn and dug up again in the spring. Labour was plentiful but work was scarce, and many children were then learning what it was to go to bed hungry.

"At the age of fourteen I was getting 5s. per week, but as my father, through getting older, and through being kicked while harnessing a colt, was beginning to get very lame and unable to follow his occupation as carter, we did not stay there long, so in August of 1887 we left Westfield for Brede. Then it was I began to realise more of the hardships of life. My father unable to get work, and I only getting 5s. a week to buy bread

for father, my three sisters and myself, often worked all day with nothing but a piece of bread to eat not so large as the hand. That is how our family existed in the winter of 1887-8.

"But in the spring of 1888 my father got work again at 3s. a day when fine, and this continued to be the wage in E. Sussex. between 1890 and 1900, though some were being paid as low as 10s. a week.

"One neighbour of ours through losing time on wet days got only 7s. a week to keep his wife and family on.

"I remember about this time during the harvest there were some oats to be carried on another farm, and being fine the men worked on till it got dark. Then it was necessary to have a light in the barn, and at twenty minutes past ten one of the lights was getting low. The boss came into the barn and seeing one lamp almost out asked the poor old chap who was stacking the oats if he didn't want a candle. The poor old fellow replied that he wanted his tea more.

"When all the corn was carried next week and the old chap went for his 12s., his kind employer took into consideration what had been done and how late they had worked without overtime pay by saying: 'Well, S——, the corn is all got together so I shall not want you again. Then perhaps you will be able to get your tea a little earlier in the future!' And the man was unemployed for many weeks.

"Fortunately for us a brickfield was opened in the district in 1891 or 1892, whilst I was eighteen years of age. The pay at the brickfield was double the pay on the farms, so you may guess what a godsend it was to the labourers. But the land was still being laid down to grass, and many that could not get work in the brickfields, emigrated to other lands to take up their abode there, to grow corn to feed those in the country they had left behind.

"My father, though now a cripple, was made the foreman of the brickfield on a wage of 24s. a week. I need not tell you how annoyed the farmers were over the brickfield. The worst of it was that as soon as the brickmaking season came to an end, the hands were stood off, and the men had to find work woodcutting, or on the road, or threshing.

"An attempt was made to organise the agricultural labourers, but it failed, and a man who was then a member of the old Labourers' Union had to flee the parish for trying to better the condition of his fellow working men. The agricultural labourer was not allowed to have a union at this time, and if a poor girl met with a misfortune she had to leave the parish by order of the parson, and if the father refused to let his daughter go he had to clear out too.

"I think we can leave this terrible time and step on to 1914, when the beginning of the awful sacrifice had to be made. Many

a worker had to leave his situation so that the farmer's son could take his place instead of going into the army, and often the worker was married with a family, whilst the son of the farmer was a single young man. I could state many cases where that was done.

"But I must go back a few years, as there are one or two things that I have omitted. There was the Old Age Pensions Act, and I was thinking of the trouble the workers were put to to get it. I well remember when my father reached the age of seventy the Pension Officer called to see him to make sure that he was not a wealthy man; asked him if he had any cash in the Bank. What a lot the poor agricultural labourer ought to have done out of their poor wages after bringing up a family! Farmers became very thoughtful about a labourer's age, and would do all they could to help them to get the Old Age Pension, and when they got it for them they hired them at lower wages.

"I well remember one poor old worker, nearly eighty years of age, still forced to work to keep himself alive; but one day he could not be seen in the field. So a search was made and the poor old chap was found in the hedge dying, but as he was only an agricultural labourer no notice was taken of him.

"When the war started the recruiting officer would tell the farm worker if he joined the army it would be a holiday for him; no food or clothes to buy, and he would be able to see the lands beyond the seas, and many of the employers went so far as to promise the men half their wage and to look after their wives and families while they were away; but these promises were soon forgotten. Farm workers began to be attracted by higher wages elsewhere, but the Labour Exchanges soon stopped all that, and when tribunals were set up as soon as a man was exempt from service he was threatened with military service if he asked for higher wages.

"In 1917, when a few of us held our first meeting in Westfield, many farmers refused to pay the minimum wage, but as the guns still roared, and the blank places in the battle lines had to be filled and labour became scarce they had to pay the 32s. per week for Sussex, and were compelled to plough the land, though many of them would not do that—grow food for the people—without the compulsory order. Though the cost of living went up twice as high as before the war, and the farmers were making large profits they still said they could not afford to pay 32s. Now they have to pay 38s. 6d.

"But the slaughter is finished and the brave lads are at home again, though not all of them that went away. . . . But oh, how we all longed for the return of those who did come back, that after all the horrors and hardships that they have had to endure, they would return to a better England than when they left. But what do we find? . . ."

PART EIGHT

WHAT OF THE HARVEST?

III. THE CORN PRODUCTION ACT AT WORK.

Farmers were no less busy than labour organisers, and whilst combination was going on apace amid the armies of the two opposing forces, the Agricultural Wages Board had set its house in order, formed its District Wages Committees, and made its first pronouncement as to wages and hours. Norfolk was the first county for which an Order was made, and this was dated May 20, 1918. Wages for ordinary labourers were fixed at 30s. for a fifty-four hour week in the summer and a forty-eight hour week for the winter months of November to February. A special class was made of cowmen, who had to work the "customary" hours for 36s. Overtime rates of pay were fixed at 8½d. an hour for week-days and 10d. for Sundays. These wages came into operation for all male workers over eighteen.

It was not until September that the Orders were eventually issued for all counties. Based on the Norfolk standard, many counties had 30s. fixed for them, others 31s. and 32s. whilst Kent and Surrey had 33s., and Middlesex and Lincolnshire 34s., and the northern counties 35s. for the same number of hours. Some counties decided that eighteen years was too young an age to receive manhood's pay, fixing this at twenty-one years. Most cowmen, shepherds and carters had to work the "customary hours" for an additional sum of 6s. As these Orders were abrogated in 1919 when an increase of 6s. 6d. a week was granted we need not detail the varying district rates.

As the cost of living had risen 106 per cent.[1] these rates

[1] Large towns 110 per cent., small towns and villages 102 per cent., United Kingdom 106 per cent.—*Labour Gazette*, April, 1918.

were by no means received with universal satisfaction. It was unfortunate that a low-paying county like Norfolk should have been the first county for which an Order was made. High as the wages appeared compared with the ordinary pre-war wages, the labourer was no better off save in one way; he had his hours defined, and for the first time in his life he could legally claim a definite overtime rate. By a restriction of his hours of labour he was able to earn more overtime, and in that manner he gained something. He at least gained more leisure.

But the man in charge of stock was kept in his old state of servitude by the unfortunate clause "customary hours." I strenuously opposed this clause on my District Wages Committee, as I knew that it would give rise to much dissatisfaction, varying not only from county to county, and parish to parish, but even from farm to farm. It bore grievously hard upon cowmen in particular. I knew cowmen, for instance, who were still getting up at 3.30 in the morning to milk, and were kept at work until half-past five in the afternoon, with hours on Sunday beginning at 4 a.m. and lasting until 11 a.m., when there was a break of an hour for pious meditation; and then work again until 1.30. For working these long hours in 1914 men were paid £1 a week in the county of Surrey! Such men under the Order were paid higher wages than the ordinary labourer, but they were working many more hours, and in spite of being generally considered more highly skilled men, were paid less per hour. Though there was a scarcity of labour, it was an injustice difficult to combat, for cottages were scarcer than men, and most cattlemen lived in farm-tied cottages. The hard taskmaster still wielded great powers. Nevertheless, this was remedied in 1919, when farm workers in most counties, irrespective of their duties, came under the general Order of fifty hours for summer, and forty-eight hours for winter. The abolition of "customary hours" was a distinct improvement, welcomed by the best of the employers, and one which made the worst employers not only shorten their hours but improve their methods of organisation.

It was an arduous task to raise the minimum higher

than 30s. after the Board's Order had been fixed for Norfolk. In my opinion the minimum rate should have been fixed in 1918 at not lower than £2, which, considering the rise in the cost of living, was barely equivalent to the £1 a week which Mr. Rowntree showed us was absolutely necessary to sustain physical efficiency before the war. Farmers were rising on the high tide of their prosperity, and if they were capable of paying £2 a week, as approximately they did, in 1919, they were capable of paying £2 a week in 1918. The Order of 30s. for Norfolk was due to the moderation of the workers' representatives, combined with the lack of data at that time as to farmers' profits to convince the appointed members that farmers would not be ruined by a higher standard.

Complaints were made both by farmers and workers of the bias displayed by these appointed members of the District Wages Committees, who, after all, were the jury which tipped the scale one way or the other, and so decided the rate. Although the District Wages Committees can only recommend to the Central Board rates and hours, their decisions are generally accepted with slight modifications. The appointed members therefore stand as the figure of Fate, uncomfortably balancing itself on the tight-rope stretched between the two parties pulling with all their strength.

I find that there are one earl, three barons, four ladies, of title, three "honourables," thirteen baronets and knights, fourteen colonels, some landowners and quite a number of Justices of the Peace, amongst those selected for possessing minds so equipoised that they can give an unbiased judgment between capital and labour.

It was natural that the workers viewed with misgiving the decisions of men and women drawn almost entirely from the employing class and felt that they were negotiating with opponents who had strong allies.[1]

[1] The inner history of the selection of appointed members should make curious reading. For the most part names were suggested by the Lord Lieutenant of each county. Now a Lord Lieutenant cannot be said to possess a strong bias towards Labour, and feeling the scales would be weighted against Labour I ventured (unofficially) to suggest one or two

I gather, however, from the workers' representatives who sit on the Central Wages Board that the appointed members have behaved with commendable fairness. These gentlemen, and the one lady, Mrs. Roland Wilkins, bear names which are honoured by all classes of the agricultural community; but I do not feel quite so sure that the appointed members on the District Committees were selected with the same care by the Board of Agriculture. Decisions arrived at show that the appointed members on these District Committees invariably tipped the scale on the side of the farmers. When workers' representatives were making demands for £2 a week and the farmers refused to go beyond 30s., there were but few instances where the appointed members gave their vote for a rate of more than a shilling or two above the farmers. The appointed members may attempt to justify their decision by the assertion that the workers made too high a demand, but this falls to the ground in the light of the decision of the following year when the minimum rates ranged from 36s. 6d. to 42s. 6d. *and the hours were materially shortened.*

On the workers' side of the District Committees, the trade union organiser is generally the chief spokesman. Yet the farm workers are beginning to feel their feet, for though most of them have never opened their lips on any public body before, it is extraordinary what advances they have made in the art of expressing themselves. For the first time in their lives they sit on an equality with farmers and draw the same payment for their public work.[1]

It is a common error to regard the farm labourer as stolid as an ox in a fattening stall. Wordsworth grasped the truth when he wrote of the peasant :—

persons in different counties whom I knew to possess a sympathetic knowledge of the life of the rural poor. One or two of these were eventually appointed, but I was not so fortunate with a lady whose knowledge of the farm workers of her county exceeded that of any other educated person of my acquaintance. I thought if it was pointed out that her grandfather was a Baron, whose peerage dated back to the middle ages, she would pass without further scrutiny. Unfortunately enquiry was made of the Lord Lieutenant of the county, who replied, " By no conceivable stretch of the imagination could *this* lady be called impartial."

[1] That is 10s. and their travelling expenses.

"Words are but under-agents in their souls;
When they are grasping with their greatest strength
They do not breathe among them."

Scrutinise the faces of the men selected to negotiate and you will find them anything but immobile. Every facial muscle moves, as they sit listening with watchful intentness. Nervous tension is betrayed by the eye, which is as keen as a hawk's; and when their silence is broken it is by the language of a long pent-up pain.

I shall never forget the outburst of a sunburnt ploughman who sat by my side on a Wages Committee and who had through several sittings never uttered a word. The farmers were complaining that boys of eighteen could not plough; that they were all but useless, when he, with every nerve twitching, broke out with: "Lookee 'ere, guvnors. You say that our boys are no good. *They* think this country is no good for them, and yet I have four sons fighting for it. In 1912 one of these boys, then aged sixteen, who was ploughing for a few shillings a week, said to me, 'Dad, I'm going to chuck this old country; it ain't good enough for the likes of us.' Well, he emigrated to Australia. In 1914 he came home with £200 in his pocket to fight for the country that had refused to give him a living wage."[1]

This speech rendered us all dumb for a few minutes. And this man had known what it was for nine in the family to sit down to a table with himself as the only breadwinner.

The farmers have behaved with exemplary fairness to their men who sat on District Wages Committees. I heard of only one unpleasant incident, and over this the National Farmers' Union very properly used its influence.

Let us take a lightning glance at an imaginary sitting of a District Wages Committee. Eight farmers sit on one side of the table; eight workers' representatives on the other; and five appointed members divide the two opposing factions. Like an auctioneer, the Chairman cautiously feels his way for a bid. How much will the farmers offer? What price do the workers put upon the value of their labour?

[1] Vide *The Awakening of England*, 1918 edition.
[2] It is easy to see the farmers have the weight on their side.

There is a dead silence. Each side waits like diplomats for the other side to show its hand. "Come on, gentlemen," pleads the Chairman. "Some one must make a start."

"Well, we want 40s.," blurts out the spokesman of the workers, who is the county organiser. He gives his reason: the extra cost of living; the profits the farmers are making, etc. The farmers lean back in their chairs, puff out their cheeks, and murmur the word "ruination."

"What about the poor land we have to farm?" shouts a farmer across the table, as though he were driving a horse-rake across the stubble, and ignoring the Chairman.

"Settle that with your landlord," replies a worker promptly. An appointed member who is a landowner moves uneasily in his chair.

"Oh, the *rent*—that's nothing," exclaims another farmer. The appointed member looks relieved.

"Then why make such a song of the Income Tax, now that you are assessed on double rents because you won't show your profits. And what about the profits you claim to make when the Government wants your land for an aerodrome?"

"Address the Chair, gentlemen, please," interposes the Chairman, feeling his position is being rendered superfluous. "Be reasonable, and come to terms if you can."

"Not a penny above 30s.," declares the most dogged of the farmers, "or the Government can take our farms."

"Mr. Chairman," says the workers' representative, "we are prepared to take possession."

"Oh, I am not aware you are the Government," chides the Chairman. The farmers laugh; but neither side bates a shilling. The Chairman then asks each side to retire. They do so; and pull out their pipes At the end of a quarter of an hour each side is summoned back and the Chairman gives the appointed members' decision: 32s. Thus does impartiality triumph.

Then as the meeting closes one of the farmers greets a ploughman with the remark: "You know, you fellows would be quite content but for your trade union agitators"

And the reply now comes without hesitation: "Ain't you got any agitators in *your* Union?"

At the end of four or five weeks the Agricultural Wages Board advertises the minimum for the county to be 32s. Then both sides declare the decision of the A.W.B. to be "monstrous." This is about the only time that they ever do agree over wages or hours.

Where the District Committees have real powers beyond merely "recommending," is in the issuing Permits to men incapable through infirmity of earning the minimum wage, and in deciding that a cottage through insanitation, defective water supply or want of repair, is not worth the 3s. a week which the farmer has the power to deduct as an "allowance" for the occupation of a farm-tied cottage.

When the Agricultural Wages Board decided that 3s. should be the maximum sum which farmers could deduct from wages for the occupation of a cottage, in counties where it has been customary to deduct only 1s., 1s. 6d., or 2s. for cottages, much discontent arose. Hence an Order was made for certain counties such as Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, Mid-Bucks and parts of Somerset, where 2s. 6d. only, and in North Bucks 2s. only, can be deducted for the occupation of a farm-tied cottage.

Some curious instances came under my notice with regard to this deduction of 3s.

In the corner of a meadow, under an oak tree, close to a by-road connecting one Surrey village with another might have been seen a tent, locally known as a "bender." It was like a diminutive Chinese sampan, or river boat, and close to it were two brown baby tents in which there was just room to boil a kettle of water. From a distance these appear like toadstools springing up from the green meadow.

In the tent slept a carter, his wife and two children. Let no one imagine, however, that this tent was a Bell tent in which a person could stand erect. Its occupants had to creep in like rabbits and sit down or lie prostrate under the old sacks which formed the tunnel-shaped roof. For this country residence, which had been *erected by the man himself*, the farmer who engaged the carter deducted the

sum of 3s. from the latter's weekly wage—regarding the edifice as a farm-tied cottage for which he imagined he was legally entitled to charge the maximum sum of 3s.

It certainly was "farm-tied," but that was about all that could be said for it, as it *was* "tied" to one of the farmer's fields. Instead, however, of paying for house accommodation, what the carter was really paying was £7 16s. per annum as ground rent for a few feet of bare earth. Worked out in cubic space it was assuredly the most expensive cottage in England; probably it is more expensive, cubic foot for cubic foot, than a mansion in Park Lane.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the man regarded it as a grievance to live amid sackcloth and ashes. It was his choice, and had been his choice, for a number of years to live under "canvas," but what he did complain of—and very rightly, too—was the iniquitous deduction of 3s. a week from his wages for the space of a man's grave!

I also visited a cottage, for the use of which 3s. was deducted from another carter's wages. One bedroom was uninhabitable because rats came down the ivy inside the room, through the roof of which rain dripped on wet nights; and while the unhappy carter ate his meals in the kitchen he could watch through the cracks in the wall the leaves dropping in the orchard! A pond green with slime was the water supply!

As a member of the Cottage Committee, Mr. Jack Shingfield visited a cottage in his area in response to a complaint. He asked the cottager's wife where the oven was. "There," she said, pointing to a corner of the room, "but it's no good." "Why not?' he asked. "Because it has no top." "Where's the copper?" "There," she answered, pointing to another corner, "but that's no good either." "Why not?" "Because it has no bottom." "Where's the well?" he next asked. "We haven't got one; we have to fetch the water from 300 yards away," came the answer. "Well, let's have a look at the bedroom," he said finally. "Wait till I fetch a ladder," said the woman, at which she brought a ladder and thrust it through a hole in the ceiling. The value of this allowance was reduced to 6d.

So bad have housing conditions become that many instances could be cited of the shifts to which both farmers and men were put to find accommodation. A farmer at Woking told the Court on June 29, 1918, that his carter with his wife and three young children were living in a cowstall without any sanitary or other convenience.

At Oswestry the Rev. D. Gwynfryn Jones gave an instance of a house in Flintshire, " with only five rooms, counting the coal-house, with four families living in it."[1]

It was found, however, that men living in farm-tied cottages were extremely chary of reporting insanitation, for fear of eviction, and through this conspiracy of silence the public has no idea of the terrible conditions under which many of the families of farm labourers are living at the present day.

Some persons have curious ideas on housing reform. At Montacute, in Somerset, a land agent suggested, that " there were persons in receipt of relief under the Poor Law, who occupy whole cottages at Montacute, who might very well be lodged together in one cottage to their own greater comfort, economy and convenience." The reply of the Rural District Council was commendably brief ; it was " There is no need to comment on this most inhuman suggestion."

In the case of Permits for the old men it is very gratifying to find that in the majority of cases farmers are paying their old retainers sums which fairly approximate to the minimum wage. One humorous case came under my notice of a farmer who sent for Permits for four of his men working in the prime of life. The reason given why he was not paying the minimum wage was that " the price of corn was not high enough." On the forms filled in by the same men the reason given why they wished to work under the minimum wage was " because master couldn't afford to pay them such high wages with corn at the price it is." Feudalism is not quite dead yet ! Of course the Permits were refused—and this happened before every farm worker got his rise of 6s. 6d.

One unpleasant incident which very nearly precipitated a strike at harvest occurred this year. It will be noted

[1] *Daily News*, 24 April, 1920.

that though the Corn Production Act was passed in 1917, men were, with rapidly rising prices, entitled legally only to 25s. a week, until the Agricultural Wages Board had fixed the minimum rate for the district. As we have seen the first Order was made only on May 20, 1918, whilst others were made three or four months later. This gave rise to much discontent, and the workers' representative on the Central Board, to prevent strikes breaking out, asked the farmers if they would not agree to all minima when fixed being retrospective from the end of March; and at their meeting on March 28, 1918, the following resolution was passed:

"That having regard to the fact that it is not possible for all the District Wages Committees to meet at once and determine what recommendations they wish to make regarding wages, etc., this Board is of the opinion that by mutual agreement between employers and workers it is desirable that any minimum rate of wages which may be fixed should be made retrospective as from the end of March."

Unfortunately, however, many farmers did not consider this resolution one which they were bound to honour as they were not consulted, and a good deal of strong feeling was displayed over the matter in many counties. Compromises were made in various counties; but I am afraid very few of the farm workers got their "back pay" as far back as March. The most honourable farmers of course fulfilled their moral obligations, but in a great many cases the partial fulfilment, or non-fulfilment, roused a good deal of bitter feeling, sundering at a blow every vestige of respect existing between master and man.

That there was no strike in the harvest field before victory was won on the battle field, credit must be given to the farm workers, who felt that they had been betrayed by the farmers. Indeed, it should be remembered that during the whole of war-time, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the astonishing rise of trade unionism amongst farm labourers not a single strike had taken place.

Owing to the rather clumsy machinery of the Corn Production Act, the Agricultural Wages Board found it was too late to fix the harvest rates for 1918 and left em-

ployers and workmen to make their own arrangements. In some counties special overtime rates were arranged by masters and men, in others a lump sum was agreed upon, such sums as £13, £14 or £15, irrespective of the time occupied. In Essex, the following agreement was drawn up between the Farmers' Union and the Workers' Union :—

"It is hereby agreed between five representatives of the Essex County Farmers' Union, and five representatives of the Workers' Union, that the harvest wages for 1918 shall be paid at the rate of 32s. per week for 54 hours, plus payment for overtime at the rate of 1s. 9d. per hour, and that the men shall be given the opportunity of working three hours' overtime per day, and that if the harvest is not completed within twenty-four fine harvest days, and the men have not been given the opportunity of working seventy-two hours' overtime in that period, they shall receive payment for seventy-two hours' overtime ; and it is also agreed that boys be paid overtime rates in proportion to their wages."

The setting up of the Agricultural Wages Board coincident with the growing confidence amongst the workers that they could improve their conditions by organisation and negotiation no doubt accounted for the weapon of the strike being laid aside for the time being. When the country was stampeded into a General Election in November, 1918, some very remarkable results were achieved by rural Labour Parties which had hitherto never attempted to contest the parliamentary seat. These Labour Parties in rural areas, were for the most part made up of branches of the farm workers' unions, and for the first time in his history Hodge had become not only industrially class-conscious, but politically class-conscious. The votes won by the following Labour candidates at the General Election, 1918, indicated the growing tendency of the rural worker to discard the old political parties and support the Party to which his trade union is affiliated.

Bridgwater (Somerset)	S. J. Plummer	5,771
Dorset (East)	A. Smith	4,321
Dorset (South)	Brette Morgan	5,159
Maldon (Essex)	G. Dallas	6,315
Saffron Walden (Essex)	J. J. Mallon	4,531
Petersfield (Hants)	J. Pile	4,267

Hereford	S. Box	3,730
Hitchen (Herts)	R. Green	5,661
Epsom (Surrey)	J. Chuter Ede	4,796
Farnham (Surrey)	J. Hayes	3,534
Guildford (Surrey)	W. Bennet	5,078
East Grinstead (Sussex)	Major D. Graham Pole	6,208
Chichester (Sussex)	F. E. Green	6,705
Lewes (Sussex)	T. Pargeter	4,164
Westbury (Wilts)	Captain E. N. Bennet	3,537
Camborne (Wilts)	G. Nicholls	6,546
Kings Lynn (Norfolk)	R. B. Walker	9,780
Norfolk (South)	George Edwards	6,536
Stroud (Glos)	Captain Kendall.	8,522

Though none of these were elected, Mr. Walker came within an ace of election, whilst Mr. R. Green, who had only a fortnight in which to conduct his campaign, scored astonishingly well. It is remarkable, surely, that Mr. Plummer, who consented to stand only two hours before the time for nomination, polled 5,771 votes. Very few, if any, of the candidates possessed any shred of political organisation, or an agent, before the campaign started, and most were in desperate financial straits to meet the £150 necessary for the Returning Officer. At the Wrekin by-election, February, 1920, Mr. Charles Duncan, the secretary of the Workers' Union, though not elected, polled very heavily, and easily beat the Coalition candidate. Mr. W. R. Smith, the President of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was successful, but he stood for a constituency which cannot be called rural. Mr. George Edwards, in delicate health, made a splendid fight of it for a man of sixty-nine. Unfortunately, Mr. J. Pile succumbed under the stress of political warfare waged in all weathers without adequate transport service, and died on the day the poll was declared.

In January, 1919, Joseph Arch passed away at his cottage at Barford at the advanced age of ninety-three. The King paid a graceful tribute to the whilom champion hedge-cutter of England by sending expressions of regret to his widow.

The New Year opened with a strike at Chatteris, which lies in the centre of the fen district of North Cambridgeshire. A minimum rate of 30s. a week had been fixed for Cambridgeshire, in spite of the fact that the wages of

the ordinary labourers varied from 36s. to 42s. per week —the majority receiving the higher rate.

On December 28, 1918, the farmers took advantage of this low minimum to reduce the wages of all labourers to 36s. a week, on the ground that it was customary to reduce wages for the winter period. As the cost of living was still rising, the workers determined to resist this reduction, and demanded in its place an increased minimum wage of 45s. per week, resolving to give a week's notice to stop work if it was not granted.

Now, though the Corn Production Act had been in existence over sixteen months the farmers refused to acknowledge any communication from the Secretary of the Workers' Union, but instead, published their decision in the local press on January 3, 1919, which was that the labourers were to have £2 per week, horsekeepers and cowmen £2 4s., rootmen 8s. a day and threshing men 9s. a day. These rates were rejected by the men, who resented the attitude of the farmers in not recognising their Union.

Mr. Harry White, the organiser, failed to secure an interview with the farmers' chairman, and on January 6, 300 men ceased work, including 30 non-union men. By the end of the week over 400 men were out, including 100 non-unionists, all of whom joined the Union during the strike.

The Agricultural Wages Board and the Food Production Department now came on the scene, with the result that on January 17 a conference was arranged between the farmers and workers, and it was mutually decided to refer the matter to arbitration, the men returning to work on the 20th, after being out a fortnight.

Sir Charles Longmore was appointed arbitrator. He met representatives from both sides on February 20. Mr. Harry White stated the workers' case whilst Mr. Ruston stated the employers'. On March 8 the award was issued. It declared that from January 17 to the corn harvest the following rates should be paid: labourers and yardmen, 42s. for a forty-eight hours' week; horsekeepers and cowmen 50s. for customary hours; rootmen 11s. per day of eight hours; threshing men, 12s. per day

of eight hours; with proportionate overtime rates for the various classes of workers.

It will be observed how far the minimum rate fixed by the Board fell short of the wages awarded here. This was the first victory won by the farm workers for a forty-eight hours week.

Employers openly confessed afterwards that they admired the manner in which the strike was conducted, and an incident occurred which confirms the statement. On Sunday, January 13, all the strikers went to church in the afternoon, when the curate congratulated the men and the Workers' Union on the way in which the strike was being carried on, and he brought a similar message from the Vicar, who was indisposed.

On the previous night at an open-air meeting one of the two men who addressed the meeting was the leader of the Salvation Army, and the other a local nonconformist preacher, while the chairman was a local publican.

Whilst ominous clouds were gathering over the fenland district of Chatteris, battalions of darker clouds charged with electricity were massing over the whole countryside. The cost of living, instead of going down, as the Prime Minister assured the workers it would after the Armistice, steadily rose. Since January 1, 1919, it had risen twenty-four points.

Finding that the newly elected Coalition Government did nothing to control profiteers effectively and that relief from such a source seemed hopeless, the strike fever began to rise in the veins of the torpid south as well as in the fiery north. Soldiers returning to the land from the War found that the New Earth which had been promised them was very much like the old, old earth; that 30s. a week purchased no more than 13s. or 14s. had before the war—and it should always be remembered that the 30s. included "allowances." Things were better in one respect: their hours of labour were curtailed and payment for overtime could be legally enforced.

But it was felt, and rightly felt, that a workman should be able to maintain himself at a reasonable standard of

comfort on wages earned by a working week of forty-eight hours without being compelled to resort to overtime to make both ends meet. Conditions should be better, and not merely on an equality with the servitude of pre-war days.

The agricultural labourer who could barely raise an organised army of 15,000 before the war now had a disciplined army of nearly 200,000. No body of workers had in the history of the English working class organised with such rapidity in spite of the tremendous difficulties which lay in the path—a path on which the milestones were few and far between.

Now, on January 15, 1919, through their representatives on the Agricultural Wages Board they made a bold demand of an all-round £1 increase for a forty-eight hours' working week. Mr. W. R. Smith, M.P., their leader, said they wished to lift the farm-worker above the pre-war conditions of life which all classes had now condemned as a degrading poverty. The meeting which followed was stormy. Every section of the Wages Board was filled with grave anxiety. If a strike took place now it would not be confined to a few parishes, but would become a national strike imperilling the food supply of the nation. This momentous time was aptly described by Sir Ailwyn Fellowes at a Conference with District Wages Committees held in May:

"The workers had made no secret of a demand for an all-round increase. From their point of view an increase was over-due when they made their demand last January. Their representatives had great difficulty in agreeing to the postponement of the matter, but they loyally accepted the Board's decision and did their best to curb the impatience of those whom they represent . . . the general situation in regard to the relations between capital and labour was disturbed; I may even say it was inflammable. Inconsiderate action might have had disastrous consequences. It is not too much to say that the country was on the edge of a precipice where a rash step might have led to a catastrophe."

Indeed, preparations were on foot for a strike on a large scale if the farmers had refused to concede anything. Farm workers around Chatteris in Cambridgeshire, in Cheshire and South-West Lancashire were getting their

50s. a week, so why could not other farmers pay the same was asked. When the matter came up for discussion again in March, the appointed members let the farmers and the workers thrash it out between themselves in an exhaustive conference of three days, which resulted in the farmers agreeing to an all-round increase of 6s. 6d. a week for male workers over twenty-one years of age. The farmers had offered an advance of 5s., which was rejected; then 6s., and finally 6s. 6d. The whole Board had three successive meetings in March when the discussion centred largely round hours. A compromise was arrived at, it being agreed on both sides that the hours without overtime pay should be fifty-four until October, when fifty hours should come into force for one month, forty-eight hours for the winter, and fifty hours for the following summer.

The workers made it understood that though they would loyally abide by this compromise, it should not prejudice them in fighting to include agriculture in the "Forty-eight Hours Bill" for all industries. The Agricultural Wages Board took up the position that the grave state of affairs in the country warranted no delay caused by referring to District Wages Committees, so immediately advertised the proposal for a month to hear objections as enjoined by the Act, and made the Order on May 6, 1919.

One result of this Order was that three or four farmers' representatives on the Sussex District Wages Committee resigned, on the grounds that when 32s. was fixed for Sussex as the minimum wage, they had carried out the law in giving the workers a "reasonable standard of comfort"!

No minimum was now less than 36s. 6d., and customary hours were abolished save in Northumberland and Durham (for which a wage of 49s. 6d. a week was fixed) and the administrative counties of Cambridge, Isle of Ely, Huntingdon, Bedford, Cumberland, Westmoreland, part of Lancaster, Denbigh, Flint, Carnarvon, Gloucester, Worcester, Merioneth, Montgomery, and Warwick, for which special arrangements were made. It will be observed that the farmers in many counties, who said in 1918 that they could not carry on the farms unless an Order were made

for customary hours, or hours ranging from sixty to seventy or more, now submitted to the new Order for fifty or forty-eight hours.

On March 3, 1919, the farm workers were granted their first great charter of leisure.[1] After this date no farmer could insist upon any of his employees working for more than 6½ hours on one working day of the week without payment of overtime. This became popularly known as the Saturday half-holiday.

The Press, including *The Times*, and even papers written for the country gentleman, displayed a lamentable ignorance over this new Order. Without troubling to read it with any care, or at any rate with any intelligence, they jumped to the conclusion that all farm workers would down tools on Saturday at about 1 o'clock and the cows would remain unmilked and the horses unfed. In reality the Order did not stipulate that the half-holiday should fall on one particular day, nor that overtime could not be worked on that day.

In practice, of course, Saturday was the day generally chosen by the workers, and the milking of cows and tending of stock went on just the same by mutual agreement between the workers and the farmers. It meant that fewer men were engaged on Saturday afternoon, the workers taking turns alternately to do the necessary work. Where a farmer employed one man only, that farmer would either milk his own cows on, say, Saturday afternoon or the cowman would agree to work every Saturday afternoon at overtime rates.

A modification was made which affected the position of special classes of workers whose weekly wages were based on customary hours. In these cases time spent in feeding and cleaning stock did not rank as overtime employment. In some counties arrangements were made between farmers and men for a fortnight's holiday at special overtime rates of payment, in lieu of the weekly half-holiday.

[1] When the Wages Board was set up the workers hoped that the half-holiday would be instantly instituted, but it was agreed to postpone it until three months after the cessation of hostilities.

The importance of farm workers obtaining one half-holiday a week of a day which is not Sunday, cannot be over-emphasised both from the national point of view and from the workers'. This particular hay-seed of having to work every day of the week for the same hours was at last removed from the labourer's shirt. The absence of a half-holiday had largely been the cause of young fellows refusing to stay in the country and drifting away into the towns. By the institution of the half-holiday village sports began to be revived at once. The attractions of town life were dimmed, and the long-closed avenue was opened for farm labourers living in districts badly served by railways, to meet together in conference to educate themselves in a manner hitherto rendered almost impossible.

In the spring of this year Orders were made for the fixing of the minimum wage for women and girls, which resulted in those over eighteen years of age receiving wages of 5d. an hour in all counties excepting Northumberland, Cumberland, the Furness district of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Westmoreland, where 6d. an hour was paid.[1]

Not only had the organised workers made a step forward in the spring of 1919, but the political class-consciousness which was expressed at the General Election found a more universal application when it reached the point of capturing many seats on Parish Councils, Rural Councils and even on that hitherto sacrosanct body, the County Council. During the war no municipal elections had taken place, and now in nearly every village where there was a branch of the N.A.L.U. or the W.U. an attempt was made to infuse life into the moribund Parish Councils.

Hitherto, with few notable exceptions, the farm worker who stood as a candidate, as I have said, found his pathway in life anything but pleasant, without an organised company of comrades to render him support either in victory or defeat.

Amongst the exceptions I should like to mention the village of Hitcham, near Ipswich, Suffolk, where seven

[1] In July an increase of one penny an hour was granted in all counties. —Vide Note to Appendix IV.

labourers formed the first Parish Council, and seven labourers have held the citadel ever since! The farmers fought the first two or three elections and then gave up the contest in despair. But Hitcham is, I think, unique in the history of Parish Councils.

Now a greater breath of freedom was abroad in the land and it was the Union, and not a Liberal Association, or a Gladstone League, which fought the elections as an organised political body, and some democratic successes were achieved.

In the parish of Ascot Wing, where six members of the Workers' Union were nominated, all were elected with a big majority. Amongst the defeated candidates was Mrs. Leopold de Rothschild, who, I have been told, owns practically the whole parish.[1]

Another remarkable election took place which throws a flood of light on the moribund condition of many a Parish Council and the quickened political sense of the workers. At the Parish Meeting of Idsworth, Hants, held at the Parish Hall, Rowlands Castle, on March 17, 1919, besides the chairman, vice-chairman and clerk, only one Local Government elector attended. The clerk explained that no nomination papers had been asked for up to the time. The chairman decided to wait until 8.15, but as no other persons turned up, and as none of the old members offered themselves for re-election, the chairman, after waiting a little longer, declared the meeting closed and instructed the clerk to report to the Returning Officer at Havant the state of affairs.

In the meantime, the local branch of the Workers' Union became very active, and a further Parish Meeting was summoned on June 16. There were fifty persons present. Seven nomination papers were handed in this time, all from members of the local Labour Party, and these were unanimously elected by the fifty persons present. Amongst the Labour candidates were a major and a parson.

[1] "You should have seen the old ones; they was like anything mesmerised; it seemed to take them by storm as the saying is, didn't seem to realise it could be true," writes a farm worker to me.

Yet this Hampshire village by no means stood alone in betraying the low pulse into which parochial politics had sunk where no workers' organisation revived the interest. In a West Sussex village, lying in a charming, but sleepy hollow of the South Downs, five persons only made their appearance at the Annual Parish Meeting.

In my own parish no organised attempt had ever been made by the workers to capture the Parish Council before 1919. The farm workers pressed me to stand with six of them, and I agreed to become once more a Parish Council candidate after a lapse of twenty years. The experience was interesting to me, for it marked a distinct milestone on the road towards freedom taken by the agricultural worker. I managed to borrow a motor car from a well-to-do gentleman who considered Parish Councils were quite harmless institutions, and I conveyed a number of electors from distant farm-tied cottages to the polling station. The marked difference I noted between 1897 and 1919 was the growing fearlessness of farm-workers and their wives. In broad daylight I whisked them away from under the very noses of their employers and from under the eyes of the Rector, who dispensed the loaves and fishes, and was working against us. Even the elderly, reared in the old school of servitude, displayed an astonishingly gay spirit of independence. Amongst these I shall always remember with special interest an old man in his smock frock who could neither read nor write and retired to bed every night at six, and an old lady of eighty who *could* read and write and who proudly refused any help on the score of failing eyesight. Had she not stitched a smock-frock for me fifteen years ago for 3s. and a brace of rabbits?

It has been impossible to obtain a list of farm workers who won seats on Parish Councils, but the number must be very considerable, judging by reports sent to me by organisers. I have, however, been able to obtain figures, which are still incomplete, of the number of "Labour" Rural District Councillors in England and Wales, and that number is 860.[1] An incomplete list of County Council seats won

[1] Supplied by the Labour Party.

by Labour representatives, excluding London, gives the number as 235. These figures are swollen by the great triumphs in the mining counties of Durham and Monmouth, where the miracle happened of Labour being in the ascendant. Members of the Workers' Union won striking victories in Essex, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Bucks, Wilts and Suffolk; whilst the N.A.L.U. won their most remarkable victories in Norfolk, where Mr. Codling, who had been forced to earn his living with a pedlar's basket on his back, won a sensational victory over Lord Hastings, and where seats were also won by Messrs. Hewitt, Peel, and Taylor, whilst Mr. Edwards remained an alderman. At the by-election in 1920 Messrs. W. Smith and Jesse Brighton have captured seats. The victory in Dorset of Mr. James, an ex-farm worker, was significant, for in that county Labour representation had been hitherto unknown.

Though the farm worker will undoubtedly play an increasing part as a candidate for the County Council, it is the Parish Council only on which he can afford to sit. The County Council will surely remain the citadel of the well-to-do until payment for attendance and travelling becomes law. Whether the Parish Council will ever become an effective regenerating force is doubtful. Certainly little can be done with a rate limited to 3d. in the pound, extended only to 6d. for special purposes by the approval of a Parish Meeting. The powers of a Parish Council may be extended, it is true. On the other hand it may be found that the unit of the parish is too small for effective village planning and the re-enclosure of land, especially where road-making water supply, and electric power on an extensive scale are involved.

An unfortunate strike broke out in Staffordshire at the end of August. The farm workers of Staffordshire were bitterly disappointed at no special harvest rates being fixed for them. Other counties, such as Cambridgeshire and Gloucestershire, were awarded 1s. 8d., Derbyshire 1s. 9d., and Yorkshire 1s. 11d. an hour for harvest overtime rates, but the farm labourers of Stafford were told to work overtime at the normal overtime rate of 10½d. an hour,

unless employers and employed made special arrangements. A conference between the Farmers' Union and the N.A.L.U. resulted in a refusal on the farmers' part to agree to fix any definite rate. Thereupon a number of men round about Tamworth, Gonsall, Eccleshall, and Wolverhampton struck work, apparently without giving proper notice. The strike dragged on for four weeks. The farmers managed to get in their crops, and the men were beaten. They had yet to learn the lesson that harvest is the worst time of all, from the workers' point of view, to succeed with a strike.

Bad feeling, unfortunately, was shown, and a few assaults took place, the strikers being heavily fined. Such instances, however, have been rare in agricultural disputes ; and when the workers' leaders called off the strike, the farmers, to their credit, agreed to reinstate every man.

On the very day the Staffordshire strike was ended—Saturday, September 27—the great railway strike started.

Now came the test as to whether that link which had been forged in the fiery furnace of war between the industrial and the rural workers would stand the strain of a great railway strike. Hitherto, the temptation to leave ill-paid work on the land for the railway had been irresistible. The railway porter's minimum was 51s. ; the farm worker's average minimum was 37s. 6d.

But the farm worker and the railway porter, the platelayer and the signalman, even in the most remote country districts, had now become comrades in the new trade union and political movement ; and many of them had seen a vision of a new earth as they stood close to one another in the ordeal of battle. The link, as of truest steel, held.

To most, not excluding those who had been watching the growing solidarity of labour, the loyalty of the farm workers to the men on the line came as a surprise. They were firmer in their determination to stand by the railway men even than the industrial workers, and this, I think, can be traced to their minds being uninfluenced by the daily press to the same extent as townsmen. They learn not from the printed page, but from Nature and their nearest

neighbours; and the younger men through the ordeal of battle had learnt much from the mill-hand and the miner.

As more and more labourers became demobilised and returned to their homes, after the feeling of relief of being discharged from military service had evaporated and they looked for the cottage with an orchard or a few acres of land which had been promised them, and found it not, a new feeling took possession of them—a feeling of bitter disappointment. Had they then fought in vain? Were they only to return to the overcrowded, insanitary cottage and be subject to be treated as a trespasser if they strayed off the road? The Government pointed to the 60,000 acres they were in the course of acquiring for settling soldiers, but even so, 60,000 acres could only settle 6,000 if we allot 10 acres to every man.

The scheme—on paper—was a good one, it was true.[1] The Government had, strange to relate, thought of making those colonies attractive to the wives and daughters. There were to be good schools, institutes, sports, dances, and even telephones and motor services. But what about a man who did not want to live in a colony in some distant county, and craved to live where all his friends were, in his native village? To provide for these County Councils were speeded up; and as much land was acquired in a year as it had taken County Councils ten years to acquire; which proved, at any rate, that the critics of County Councils were right in blaming them for their supineness in the past. The Land Settlement (Facilities) Act was passed giving the County Councils further compulsory powers.

County Councils are now buying estates large enough to encourage co-operation amongst the settlers, but they still have to pay the landlord's price, which has advanced 30 per cent., 40 per cent. or even 50 per cent. The trouble is that after a few years have passed ex-soldiers will be called

[1] Credit should be given to Sir Harry Verney and his Committee for drafting the scheme (Cd. 8182). The absurd limitations as to borrowing necessary capital embodied in the 1916 Act have now been broadened (Vide *First Advice to Would-be Farmers* by F. E. Green.—*Country Life* Library.)

upon to pay heavily for the footing on the land for which they have fought. They will find, as Mr. Joseph Fels did at Mayland in Essex, that the acquisition of land for small holdings inevitably means the growth of a golden harvest for the surrounding landlords. And although the approved ex-soldier may be granted land in his own county, the cottage with an acre, or even half an acre, attached, which he desires to possess in his own village, remains as elusive as ever. Already the Ministry of Agriculture is discouraging County Councils creating isolated holdings in villages and thereby defeating one of the features of the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act.[1] No doubt it is wiser to encourage colony making, but why make the special promises and special provisions unless it is intended to carry them out? Discharged soldiers now recall with bitter reflections the recruiting posters of a picturesque cottage, a meadow and an orchard, with the alluring legend, "Is this worth fighting for?"

Controversy in the late summer and autumn of 1919 in the agricultural world raged round the Hours of Employment Bill. The ways of the Government in regard to this Bill were conducted behind a veil of mystery. Farmers had declared vociferously that they must know what the future agricultural policy of the Government was before they could plan the cultivation of their farms. One would have thought that the sense of "insecurity" under which they smarted, as farm after farm was thrown into the auction market, derived from the tenuous hold they had on the land, rather than from any other cause.

However, a Royal Commission on Agriculture was instituted on which, excepting the Coal Commission, for the first time Labour representatives were asked to sit. Harassed by the importunities of his landowning friends, who

[1] Besides permitting the acquisition of holdings of less than an acre (half-an-acre) this Act contains this useful clause: "The Council of any borough, urban district or parish may purchase any fruit trees, seeds, plants, fertilizers or implements required for the purposes of allotments cultivated as gardens, whether provided by the Council or otherwise, and sell any article so purchased to the cultivators, or, in the case of implements, allow their use, at a price or charge sufficient to cover the cost of purchase."

had resented the invasion of the State tractor in their parks and meadows, and certain features of the Land Facilities Bill, and attacked right and left by the farmers, who detested the policy of control and supervision, Lord Ernle resigned office. Thus passed a great gentleman from the high office he had filled with dignity and fairness during the nation's darkest hours. Before he resigned the Government had agreed, after receiving the decision of the Industrial Council, at which employers and employed were equally represented, to *include* agriculture in the forthcoming Forty-eight Hours Bill.

Into Lord Ernle's place stepped Lord Lee, the friend of the Prime Minister. No sooner was the Baron seated than he tried to break a lance with that doughty Knight, Sir Ailwyn Fellowes, and the Baron fell most ingloriously in combat. Without understanding, he tilted at the new fifty and forty-eight hours Order, making the blunder, which no Minister of Agriculture should have made, of assuming that no farm labourer was to be allowed to work more than these hours. The Knight, backed by his loyal followers, fell upon the Baron and wounded him sorely, telling him unequivocally that there was no law in the land to prevent the farm labourer if he chose from working all day and all night provided the proper overtime rates were paid.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture, owing to the clumsiness of the Government, did not meet until July was far advanced, and when the members sat round the table for the first time, they discovered that the terms of reference on which they had consented to enquire had been altered since acceptance by the majority of them. The terms were now " to enquire into the economic prospects of the agricultural industry in Great Britain with special reference to the adjustment of a balance between the prices of agricultural commodities, the costs of production, the remuneration of labour, *and hours of employment.*"

The words " hours of employment " had been added to the original terms of reference. Why ?

Because the Government had *after including agriculture in the first Bill presented* decided to exclude agriculture from

the Forty-eight Hours Bill ; and it was evidently their policy to place on the shoulders of the Commission not only the onus of fixing the guaranteed prices, but also the hours of employment.

Naturally, the Labour members on the Commission felt that they had been led into a political trap. Their representatives had already fought and won the battle on the Industrial Council, and they had no intention of fighting it over again ; at any rate, they considered it an unjustifiable act on the part of the Government to alter the terms of reference without proper notification. In this the farmers and economists sitting on the Commission loyally supported their colleagues. Furthermore, the whole Commission, with one exception, intimated to the Board of Agriculture, that, in spite of its protestation, they considered it their duty to enquire into security of tenure, if they had to consider the " economic prospects " of the agricultural industry.

It became evident that neither Mr. Lloyd George nor Lord Lee appreciated the independent spirit shown by the members of the Commission. This was shown in the speech which was delivered by the Prime Minister at Caxton Hall, and by statements made by officers of the Board, to the effect that the Commission were responsible for checking the hand of the sower in putting in the Michaelmas corn. The Government had intimated they wanted an Interim Report by September though the first sitting of the Commission to take evidence did not take place until August 5, and the *Commission had to cover the whole field of the cost of production with all the data available.* Delay had been caused by the questionable political manœuvres of the Government ; but even without the delay accountants agreed that neither the Costings Committee appointed by the Government nor the farmers had sufficient costings data to justify any report being made before the end of the year.

As the Commission proceeded it became obvious to those Government officials who followed the printed evidence carefully, that the majority of the Commission might declare against guaranteed prices. Mr. Lloyd George

(flushed with having victoriously torpedoed the Profiteering Committee) at a meeting of agriculturists at Caxton Hall on October 21, with Lord Lee at his elbow, delivered a lecture to the members of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, in which, without waiting for that Commission's Report, he outlined a policy of guaranteed prices for a period (unstated) of years and at a figure (unstated) approximating to the present prices.

At Labour—it is true there was hardly an agricultural labourer present though there were a few workers' representatives—he shook an admonitory finger, warning them not "to drive too hard a bargain." It became evident, even to the dullest intellect, that Mr. Lloyd George could no longer be considered a champion of the agricultural labourer. Before the landowners present he sat on the stool of repentance. He prayed forgiveness for his Limehouse speeches. He evidently wanted them to forget he had ever made this famous peroration: "We want to do something to bring the land within the grasp of the people. The resources of the land are frozen by the old feudal system. I am looking forward to the spring-time when the thaw will set in, and when the people, and the children of the people, shall enter into the inheritance given them from on high."

The Commission published its Interim Report in December. The Majority, viz. twelve, including the Chairman, out of twenty-three members—with many reservations by Mr. Cautley—recommended :—

"That whilst the producer should be allowed an unrestricted market for his produce, that for the grain crops of 1920 and subsequent years the guarantees be calculated from year to year on a sliding scale based on the average bare costs of cereal production of the preceding year, rent being disregarded for this purpose ; and that the datum line to which increases or decreases in the average costs of the 1920 grain crops above or below those of 1919 should be applied, shall be 68s. per quarter of 504 lb. of wheat, 59s. per quarter of 448 lb. of barley, and 46s. per quarter of 336 lb. of oats.

"That the guarantees be continued until Parliament otherwise decides, subject to not less than four years' notice of withdrawal being given."

The Minority Report recommended.

"That farmers be informed that they shall be left free to cultivate their land in such manner as they deem best, in accordance with the rules of good husbandry.

"That the Boards of Agriculture organise an efficient system of distribution of all available information relating to the progress and prospects of agriculture, with special reference to the course of world prices.

"That, so long as prices of cereals are controlled by the Government, the farmers be paid at prices not less than those at which commodities can be imported."

It also accentuated the need for further report on security of tenure and other matters.

The Majority Report was signed by Sir William B. Peat (Chairman), Sir William Ashley, and Messrs. Charles Douglas, G. G. Rea, W. Anker Simmons, H. Overman, A. Batchelor, H. S. Cautley, E. W. Langford, George Nicholls, E. H. Parker, and Rowland R. Robbins. The Minority Report was signed by Messrs. Arthur W. Ashby, George Dallas, Joseph F. Duncan, William Edwards, F. E. Green, J. M. Henderson, Thomas Henderson, Thomas P. Jones, Reginald Lennard, Walter R. Smith, and R. B. Walker.

I was convinced, both by the evidence and by my own personal knowledge, that the plough which drove its share through the grass-land in war time was not drawn by the team of guaranteed prices for wheat and oats, but by the petrol power of Compulsory Orders. Writing as a member of the Commission I may say that the whole problem of guaranteed prices resolved itself into a psychological one. The prices that farmers received for their corn were, and still are, high above the guaranteed prices of the Act; but the fear that the world's prices might drop considerably in a short time was honestly felt by a great number of uneducated farmers, who had been frightened by stories of vast stretches of golden grain in Siberia; of plains of luxuriant wheat watered by the Euphrates and Tigris; of giant granaries of grain waiting for shipment on the seaboard of the Argentine prairies, sedulously circulated by interested propagandists. The more enlightened and progressive farmers showed greater keen-

ness over security of tenure, transport, equipment, and the game laws, than they did over a guaranteed price, which few of them cared to see established as a permanent feature in British agriculture, carrying with it as it does the dangerous tendency to encourage slovenly farming. I felt convinced, too, that a guaranteed price of 68s. per quarter for wheat would not help to produce a single extra acre of wheat in this country. Whilst the farmer knew that the world's price was approximately 100s. a quarter, he resented being paid only 76s., and whilst he was in that mood 68s. made no appeal to him. But as we shall see the Commission was not allowed to investigate those regions of reform which would be of permanent value to British agriculture.

PART EIGHT

WHAT OF THE HARVEST?

IV. 1920.

It would be an error to assume that though agricultural workers had the protection of the law in demanding the minimum wage, that they always obtained it. The number of enquiries and prosecutions which had to be taken up by the Wages Board Inspectors, show how secure farmers still considered their position to be if they stubbornly set their faces against the law. The number of complaints received at the Wages Board from October 28, 1918, to December 31, 1919, were no less than 5,266. The number of cases "completed" were 3,898. The amount recovered by the Board, of wages due, was £9,532. The number of cases in which prosecutions were entered into were 127.

These figures give no indication of the wages recovered (without reference to the Board) by the agricultural unions ;[1] but they are large enough to show us how necessary have been the unions to the men, for in the majority of cases cited above, the amounts were recovered by Trade Union secretaries reporting cases to the Board after failing to make farmers pay. Indeed, so congested has become this Department of the Board that steps should be taken to delegate to District Committees the duties of inspection and prosecution. District Committees could do this work more expeditiously than a centralised Department, and they would then have something more to do than issue permits and glance occasionally at an insanitary cottage.

That Justices of the Peace in rural areas betrayed their bias in favour of the employing class, is evinced by the num-

[1] According to *The Land Worker*, March 18, 1920, the N.A.L.U. *in one month alone* recovered over £1,000 of arrears of pay, and every month hundreds of pounds are recovered by trade union effort.

ber of prosecutions reported in the *Wages Board Gazette* in which the statutory fine, " not exceeding £20 and to a fine not exceeding £1 for each day on which the offence is continued after conviction therefor," were not imposed in spite of many a flagrant defiance of the law.

This, unfortunately, is not the end of the story. The victimisation pay-sheets of the two Unions reveal a state of things which is discreditable to a civilised community. In the winter of 1919, a number of men were discharged and it was invariably the active trade unionist who received his " marching orders," in spite of the fact that in many instances he had fought for his country, while his employer had remained at home. These dismissals are all the more significant when we learn from the January Report of the Ministry of Labour that there was a shortage of skilled labour.

When inspectors called upon the farmers to enquire about the non-payment of the minimum wage, farmers have been known again and again to give an instant notice to the man who had made the complaint. Consequently there are, at the present moment a number of farm labourers working for less than the minimum wage because of the fear of dismissal or eviction. I have followed up a number of these cases myself and ventured to appeal to the sense of justice in all farmers in an open letter which was printed in a number of newspapers.[1] I may say that the National Farmers' Union deny any official knowledge of victimisation, and

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[1] CLEAN FIGHTING.

AN APPEAL TO FARMERS.

I know some of you in Surrey, Hants, and Sussex, as straightforward, clean-fighting, honest English gentlemen, but what, oh ! what am I to call those farmers who to-day are putting men out on the roadside—men who went across the seas to fight for you whilst you were permitted to stay at home to make money. You know that the bones of many thousands of farm labourers have been bleaching on the plains of Flanders while most of you have been able to remain at home in your comfortable homesteads.

It has come to my knowledge that some farmers are victimising discharged soldiers and other labourers who have taken an active part in their Trade Unions. They have not been given notice in a straightforward manner, but have been sacked under some pretext or other. I ask you, is this playing the game ? Is it clean fighting ? Is it English ? Is it not hitting below the belt ?

Don't you admire these men who stand up pluckily for their rights, and the rights of their mates ? Do you want to rear a race of broken

thoroughly disapprove of the actions of black sheep amongst their flock over whom they contend they have little control. But it seems as if a little more effective shepherding would check that spirit of hostility which is steadily growing in certain districts.

My own experience is that the worst offenders in refusing to pay the legal minimum wage are not farmers, but landowners farming their own land. I have reported several of these to the Board, and in each case they have been very wealthy men who can plead neither poverty nor ignorance. In one instance the bailiff went so far as to advertise that 'no Union man need apply,' and when the men asked for the correct wage he gave them a week's notice! Herein lies the power of the large landowner. He owns the cottages; and the men, afraid of being turned out on to the roadside, submit to being robbed.

Apparently, there is no feeling of *noblesse oblige* amongst even these titled gentry, and they seem to experience no dishonour in being fined. Each case should now be taken separately, costs assessed separately, and the maximum fine imposed on those who are flagrantly defying the law.

A sad case was reported in a Sussex paper in 1919 of a man who won his appeal for his minimum wage, which he recovered at a court of law, and then was sent to Coventry by his new employer by being made to work alone in a field.

spirited, servile English peasants? For you must recognise that these are the most English—the *white* men—amongst our workers—these men who will sacrifice their job to win justice for their comrades. These are the very men who made the best fighters at the Front. Surely you must admire them for displaying the sturdy independence of our historic British peasantry?

Therefore I appeal to you, to the sportsman in you, to bring pressure to bear upon the black sheep amongst your own flock, upon the mean farmers, who are cowardly enough to victimise men who show any moral courage.

We respect those of you who take an active part in your own Trade Union. Surely you should return the compliment. You have never heard of labourers victimising a farmer by striking because he belongs to his Union. You cannot approve of labourers being victimised because they are doing what the best of you are doing.

I appeal to you therefore as lovers of British fair play to put a stop to this evil spirit of persecution which has taken possession of the meaner members of your fraternity, and insist upon them fighting in a clean way. Your Union is now strong enough to do this. Give these members a straight talking to. Do it *now*—before it is too late—before *all* farmers are looked upon as being tarred with the same brush.

F. E. GREEN.

This so preyed upon his mind that he committed suicide.

The fear of eviction is greater than the fear of dismissal, and until the labourer is as secure of his home as the farmer is of his holding, beneficent Acts of Parliament will fail to operate effectively. Arch's "cottage-right" is as much needed now as it was in 1881.

Terrible as was the shortage of cottages before the war, that shortage has been infinitely increased during war-time. Eviction from a cottage now almost inevitably leads to exile from the parish, and the fear of eviction holds the man who has taken root in his own parish from asking for his rights more than the fear of dismissal. In 1913[1] it was estimated that from 300,000 to 350,000 farm workers lived in farm-tied cottages, which means, according to current figures, more than half of our agricultural labourers are doing so to-day.

An amendment to the Rent Restriction Act was passed in December, 1919, which appeared to make it difficult to evict a tenant if there is no alternative accommodation; but few understand this Act,[2] and fear takes a long time to die. Unfortunately, the absence of "alternative accommodation" does not afford sufficient protection to the farm labourer from eviction, especially if he lives in a tied cottage. The Court can go through the form of "considering" the alternative accommodation, and issue the ejectment order if it pleases. The Act, even as amended, is still quite unsatisfactory, and as loosely worded as any County Court lawyer could wish.

The cottage problem is indeed the most serious problem of all in rural England to-day. It is difficult to see how we are going to retain the services of our most virile young men on the land until new cottages are built. Young men and women have nowhere to go if they wish to get married, but to drift to the towns and add to the congested areas of our great cities.

The Government delivered a cruel blow to agriculture when it played into the hands of the large profiteering contractors by ceasing to control building materials. Our

[1] The Land Enquiry.
[2] This Act which expired in June, 1919, is now being extended.

one hope seems now to be in Guilds of Building Operatives erecting cottages, dispensing with the profit-taking builder.

Tragic as many of these eviction cases are, fortunately there is sometimes a humorous side to them. The following report was given me by an eye-witness at the County Court at Arundel, in 1919.

A discharged soldier found on being demobilised Christmas, 1918, that his wife and family, goods and chattels had been removed by a farmer from one cottage to another without his, or his wife's, consent. On returning home he refused to pay rent, except from the time of demobilisation. This the new owner of the farm and cottage refused to accept, and summoned the discharged soldier for arrears of rent. When the case came up the following conversation took place between the Judge and the farmer: *Judge:* "How do you prove your title to these cottages?" *Farmer:* "I don't know what you mean." *Judge:* "Surely you know what a title is; you've been to school." *Farmer:* "We bought the property in the name of —— and rent it with the farm." *Judge:* "How do you prove the cottage is yours, and that this man has not as much right as you have to the cottage?" *Farmer:* "I moved the woman there because I wanted the cottage she lived in." *Judge:* "You say you moved her there, and dumped her and the nine children down as if they were chairs or tables without proving your title to the cottage?" *Farmer:* "We bought it, your Honour." *Judge:* "How do you prove it? Have you the title deeds?" *Farmer:* "No." *Judge:* "Then you have no case." *Farmer:* "But they pay no rent, your Honour." *Judge:* "And you have not proved you are entitled to collect rent." *Farmer:* "The man has come home and is living in the cottage with his wife." *Judge:* "Surely you do not object to the man living with his wife. You are not jealous, are you?"

The Judge dismissed the case, advising the farmer to engage counsel next time. The farmer has since admitted that he never felt such a fool in his life!

According to calculations made in April, 1916, the number of permanent full-time workers employed in agriculture

in England and Wales in July, 1914, was approximately 750,000, of whom about 693,000 were males and 57,000 females. These numbers were considerably reduced during the war owing to enlistment, but in November, 1919, the numbers rose again to 554,000 males and 60,000 females; and in January, 1920, it was estimated that there were 462,000 men, 588,000 boys and 49,000 women and girls.[1] These figures show, especially after the increase of arable farming which took place during the war, that the land must be starved of labour even more than it was in 1914.[2] But it is difficult to see how we are going to increase the number of agricultural workers until there is more housing accommodation available.

In comparing these figures with those of the men organised we realise how amazing has been the growth of trade unionism amongst agricultural workers. Before the war, or even in 1914, I doubt if there were more than 15,000 farm labourers enrolled as members of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and the Workers' Union, giving 10,000 to the former, according to their Trade Union Congress figures in 1914, and 5,000 to the latter, based on estimates I have made from enquiries of the chief officials.

At the Conference of representatives of agricultural workers in the Workers' Union held in January, 1920, in their agricultural section alone a membership of 150,000 was claimed. In the same month the N.A.L.U. reported to me a membership of 200,000, all being farm workers, with the exception of about 2,200, who are village blacksmiths, and village carpenters, etc.[3] It is historic justice that the town of Dorchester which condemned six men in 1834 to transportation for joining a trade union, should to-day possess the strongest branch, with a membership of 900, of any agricultural labourer's union. Amazing as was the rapid growth of the N.A.L.U., that of the Workers' Union was still more astonishing. Besides there are a number of farm labourers enrolled in the National Union of Gen-

[1] *Wages Board Gazette*, April, 1920.
[2] *Ibid.*, January 1, 1920.
[3] In October 1919 the actual numbers were 170,749, which I take from an official return I was privileged to see.

eral Workers, National Amalgamated Labourers' Union, National Union of Labour, the Navvies' and the National Bricklayers' Labourers' Union. We may therefore reckon that more than half of the agricultural labourers in England and Wales are now organised industrially.

In January, 1920, a demand was made by the farm workers for a minimum wage of 50s. on a forty-eight hours' week. His average earnings, including all allowances, stood in 1919 at 37s. 6d., and the cost of living had steadily risen. To spend a whole week's wages on purchasing a pair of boots for her ploughman-husband—boots which lasted only six months—let alone the purchase of shoes for her children and clothes (which had risen 300 per cent. in price) for all the family, filled every wife with anxiety. Had not farmers declared before the Tribunals that their farms could not be worked without the labour of this or that man? As the unskilled labourer in any industry was awarded 50s. or more why should not the craftsman of the fields be paid as much? All workers began to feel it would be disastrous to British agriculture if farm labourers left the land as soon as the building boom began, in order to obtain the £3 a week, or more, paid to any bricklayer's labourer.

Furthermore, in the face of the evidence before the Royal Commission on Agriculture, that the Forfar farmer paid his ploughman £3 a week, and provided him with meal, milk, potatoes, a cottage, and fuel, which altogether were equivalent to £190 a year[1] the claim for 50s. seemed irresistible. That much of the land in Forfar is first-class is undeniable, but there is also poor land in this county on which the farmer has to pay exactly the same wages, and the £190 a year is paid in cash and kind on land which is rented as highly as £3 10s. an acre.

However, the 50s. a week minimum was not granted, but on March 8, after consulting the District Wages Committees, the Agricultural Wages Board decided to publish a proposal to raise the minimum wage to 42s., with an increase of 4s.[2] a week in areas where the rate was already fixed

[1] *Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Agriculture*, Vol. II., par. 8705.

[2] With the recent increase in the price of bread the 4s. increase in the wage of a farm labourer with a family will be rendered nugatory.

higher than 38s.[1] The Order took effect from April 19, and Proposals were made for proportionate higher scales for male workers under 21 and for women. (vide Appendix)[2]

On the publication of the Proposal with the meagre increase in the minimum wage, trouble immediately broke out in Lancashire and Essex. West Lancashire once again became the storm-centre and a strike on March 20 was averted only by the farmers and workers coming to an agreement for a standard wage of £3 a week, which is the highest regular rate of payment for agricultural labour in England.

Despite the fact that farms had been worked during the War with at least 100,000 fewer male workers, agriculture was the one industry which could show an increase in production. Even before the War (1911) the stockman was tending twice the number of cattle that he looked after in 1871.[3]

Almost simultaneously the Government announced the fact that in view of the serious decline of the wheat area since last year, they would guarantee the farmer the average world price of imported wheat up to a maximum of 95s. per quarter of 504 lb., for 1920, and 100s. for 1921; and at the same time announced their intention to introduce a Bill early in the session to carry into effect the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, that minimum prices should be based upon and varying with the cost of production as a continuous policy, subject to four years' notice, before it can be withdrawn.

In the previous month Lord Lee intimated to the Chairman of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, that the Prime Minister was advising his Majesty to release the Commission from its duties and to bring its proceedings to a close. This letter followed after the resignations of seven members of the Commission had taken place—seven members who had apparently grown weary of well-doing. The sixteen remaining members, including all the Scotch and Welsh members, had decided to continue to sit and to carry out

[1] *Vide* Appendix IV of complete schedule of all counties.

[2] A proposal for a further increase of 4/– a week on all minima rates was made by the A.W.B. on the 3rd June, 1920, bringing the minimum to 46–/.

[3] *Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture.*—Cd. 24, 1919.

the terms of reference, to consider the economic prospects of agriculture and to issue their Final Report.

But it was soon made manifest, as I have already intimated, that the Government were not serious in appointing the Commission "to consider the economic prospects of agriculture": they were only serious in obtaining a decision as to the price to offer farmers for their cereals. It was not an unusual line for this Government to take, which ever since its formation has lived from hand to mouth. But the Minister of Agriculture had surely put himself out of court in the eyes of the public, in refusing to allow the presentation of a Final Report by a Commission which his Ministry had created.

Lord Lee, in a letter addressed to Sir William Peat, stated his objection to any enquiry into security of tenure without the presence of landowners on the Commission, and that the subjects which the Commission intended to investigate were outside the terms of reference and had already been dealt with by Lord Selborne's Committee.

Now Lord Selborne's Committee was appointed in 1916, and since then the ownership of half the farms in many counties in England and Wales had changed hands. Thus new conditions had been created giving farmers a sense of insecurity greater than they had hitherto experienced.

In a dignified, but scathing letter, signed by the sixteen members of the Commission (that is, by the total body since seven had resigned) addressed to Lord Lee, it was pointed out to him that at the very first sitting of the Commission

"it was resolved, one member alone dissenting, 'that the Royal Commission agrees to consider the subject of security of tenure in relation to the costs of production and to the general economic prospects of the farming industry.' It had thus been resolved by the Commission and apparently agreed by the Government that security of tenure is a factor which cannot be omitted in any adequate examination of the economic conditions of production. The Commission had at no stage resolved or intended to consider this subject otherwise than in its relation to agricultural production, but they had thought it right to point out to H. M. Government that the problem could not be discussed at all unless the possible solutions were allowed to be examined without restriction of their method or scope."

The Commission had already welcomed the addition of landowning members which it imagined the Government would appoint in due course, and it had no intention of spending much time on hackneyed subjects such as co-operation and small-holdings, which had been fully discussed by the Selborne Committee.

Every economist has agreed that a policy of guaranteed prices, whether one is in favour of it or is not, can only be a temporary, artificial device, and that if the economic prospect of agriculture is to build on that as a foundation stone, it will be built on shifting sands, swayed by varying political waves of feeling. Its permanent prosperity is surely dependent upon giving security of tenure to farmers, cottage-rights to labourers, a new system of transport and marketing, drainage, equipment of farms, the abolition of game laws, which are by no means efficiently explored by the Selborne Committee, especially in view of the changed conditions since the end of the war. But as the editor of *Farm Life* wrote :— [1]

" the Government had already made up its mind and did not intend to do anything suggested by the Commission that had not been agreed upon previously by the gentlemen behind the scenes who manage these affairs whether they concern corn or coal or less essential matters. . . . No body of men has ever enquired into the agricultural problem more ably, or painstakingly, or courageously than the Farmer and Labour members of this Commission ; and the present day student and the future historian alike will find in the evidence, and especially in the replies to questions, more illumination on the details of British agriculture in our time than can be found anywhere else."

Though the Interim Report was restricted to a statement on the merits or demerits of guaranteed prices, and concerned the farmer more than the labourer, the student will find in the printed evidence abundant information dealing with the life of the labourer.

Lord Lee, though possessing great energy, is a man of war rather than an agriculturist ; and his Prime Minister is essentially a politician. Neither of them is an economist. Neither of them seems to have grasped the fact, for instance, that if

[1] March 6, 1920.

farmers are locking up their available capital in the forced purchase of farms they will have less capital to develop them. Both Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Lee have uttered economic puerilities in trying to scare the public into the belief that our adverse exchange is due to the British farmer not growing quite so much wheat. As long as the British Government are permitted to borrow from day to day from international financiers in the City, instead of taxing them, so long will British credit suffer; and it will continue to suffer if labour is diverted from the highly productive industries such as ship-building, to plough the unprofitable field, for to pursue that policy, as opposed to arable dairying, is to plough the sands.

The Government, as usual, had but one panacea—high prices; and in spite of the fact that farmers had again and again in giving evidence declared that guaranteed prices were of little avail without security of tenure, refused to allow a discussion on that point. Thus the Commission which would have attempted to outline a real agricultural policy of lasting benefit to the country was suddenly brought to a close by the ukase of Lord Lee.

Perhaps it was not to be wondered at that the Government should view with disquietude the findings of a Commission on which it was plain to all who read the Evidence, that after the dangerous rock of guaranteed prices had been passed the opposing elements of farmer and labourer were coalescing.

We have seen that farm labourers have been rapidly becoming one of the best organised crafts in the country; but farmers have not been behindhand either, and the National Farmers' Union now numbers some 100,000 members. Are labourers, now that they are so well organised, more antagonistic to farmers than they were in the 'seventies or 'eighties? To this I would answer unhesitatingly, that the antagonism has moved to a higher plane. It is less bitter; less personal. In Arch's time the farmers were unorganised, and the men regarded their masters as *personally* responsible for the undue hardships, the unjustifiably long hours and low wages which were their lot in life. Masters and men never met in conference. They never thrashed out things together. Now

they do, and though antagonism exists, both farmers and men are more educated; their understanding is greater; their horizon has widened. The farmers on their side, since they have been organised, have shed certain industrial and political prejudices and acquired more political principles. They are beginning to view affairs from a national, rather than from a class point of view.

Both classes have come to realise that it is not only a question of wages and hours, but that it is equally as much a question of more and better cottages, of tenure, of transport, of markets, of drainage, of equipment, of coal and electric power. The labourers understand quite as well as the farmers that agriculture can never prosper, and be remunerative either to employer or employed, where the land is waterlogged; where tenants are subject to quit without proper compensation; where capital and machinery are lacking. Labourers no longer worry themselves over the disestablishment of the Church, as Arch did. Cobbett regarded "a couple of flitches worth 50,000 Methodist sermons," and men to-day are regarding the right distribution of water as of more importance than the re-distribution of tithes; for this new orientation of knowledge the much maligned agitator is responsible. The farm labourer is beginning to read tracts other than those to be found within the pages of the Parish Magazine; and it is to be hoped that the subjective poverty which he has endured through the dark depressing ages covered by this history, will be lightened by an extension of public libraries in the villages under the operations of the Public Libraries Act, December, 1919.

It may be, as they watch the successful development of State Co-partnership farms at Patringdon and elsewhere, that they will regard communal ownership and working of land as the only goal in the race of wages and prices.

And what of their attitude to the squire or landlord? There is little or none of that class hatred so vividly imagined by nervous persons. The attitude of mind towards the squire has been that of tolerant puzzlement; of disappointment: "If *he* only knew, if we could only get at *him*, things would have been different; but it is that —— bailiff,"

has been the commonly expressed sentiment. But the landlord is receding more and more into the background ; and the farmer, as owner, is rapidly taking his place.

More and more the farmer and the farm labourer will be drawn together, not only on agricultural wages boards and committees but also on the new Council of Agriculture for England [1] in which the agricultural labourer is to take a seat by statutory right. He may be selected to sit as an expert on a County Agricultural Committee. The State now recognises that he is as much interested in good husbandry as the farmer, and as there are three labourers to one farmer, the prosperity of the industry is even more his concern than the farmer's.

The farm labourer's social status has altered for the better in war-time, and with this improvement we may look for a change in the attitude of the girls to the farm worker as a life-companion. No longer, let us hope, shall we hear wives of farm labourers imploring their daughters, as one mother implored her daughter who is known to me, " Promise me never to marry a farm labourer, my dear." She promised, and did not marry a farm labourer. Nevertheless she never deserted her class, but to-day sits on a Wages Committee as a representative of the workers. Since the passing of the Corn Production Act the farm worker has become socially a more desirable mate than the smart young gardener at the big house, for the farm worker has a wage higher than the gardener's. When employers refused to pay their gardeners the labourer's wage the gardener on many an estate stepped up and not down the social scale as he became a farm worker.

Cottage girls who have watched during war-time rich men doing work of " national importance " in loading tumbrils with dung with the exalted look of a saint ; who have seen the squire's and the vicar's daughters working as field labourer's, milking cows and cleaning out byres, have come to realise that there is no indignity in farm work—that the indignity lies only in the sordid conditions which have prevailed.

The objection to farm work on the part of cottage women,

[1] Vide Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Act, December, 1919.

even by those who have no children to care for, is not to be condemned as an example of the perverse snobbery of the poor. Its roots lie deep in the rank soil of social degradation when poverty drove their mothers to work as field labourers in gangs hovelled promiscuously like swine. In those dark days to be a female worker in a gang was to be a social outcast; and the miserable pittance meted out to women for milking cows or cleaning roots since the gang system was abolished did not compensate for the damage done to their health, their skirts, or their boots in wet weather.[1]

To work at haymaking, harvesting, and fruit-picking when the sun is shining was one thing, but to get your skirts saturated by wet sprouts or roots, or soiled by the mire of the cow-yard, even for 1s. 6d. a day, was another matter. The sensible introduction of breeches and leggings; the higher wages fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board; and the greater respect shown by farmers to women workers on the land effected a speedy transformation.

The farm-worker is once more taking his place in the social life of the village as he did in the more leisured days of a hundred and fifty years ago. As a member of a Trade Union, of a Sports, of a District Wages Committee, or of a Food Control Committee; as a parish councillor, or even as a county councillor, though still a farm labourer, he is a worker who is able to hold his head higher than has been his lot for many a long year. He walks, even on heavy clay soil, with a more elastic step, and since demobilisation he joins in country dances and impromptu concerts. He has expressed himself in drama at Glastonbury of Arthurian legends; and across the melancholy meres of Cambridge, the deep-throated fenman sings a song in which the cadences are in flawless unison with life. His manners are not to be judged by the conventions of other classes. The gentleman who is the first to open a door to a lady is often the first to shut it in the face of Woman. His manners are not the manners of those who live on terms of good-humoured friendship with their wives.

[1] Even as late as May, 1916, a case was reported by the Somerset Women's War Service Committee of a labourer's wife who was paid only 4s. 8d. a week for milking twelve cows morning and evening.

It may be as Professor Pigou pointed out, that higher wages will drive the inefficient farmer from business, but that surely is not an undesirable consummation. What the farm labourer has won in better conditions he will never relinquish. Landlords may go ; the inefficient farmer may go ; and if neither landlord nor farmer will cultivate the land, he, the peasant, will remain to reap what he has sown

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APPENDIX I

AVERAGE PRICES, PER IMPERIAL QUARTER, OF BRITISH CORN, IN ENGLAND AND WALES FROM 1850 TO 1919

Year.	Wheat.		Barley.		Oats.		Year.	Wheat.		Barley.		Oats.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1850	40	3	23	5	16	5	1885	32	10	30	1	20	7
1851	38	6	24	9	18	7	1886	31	0	26	7	19	0
1852	40	9	28	6	19	1	1887	32	6	25	4	16	3
1853	53	3	33	2	21	0	1888	31	10	27	10	16	9
1854	72	5	36	0	27	11	1889	29	9	25	10	17	9
1855	74	8	34	9	27	5	1890	31	11	28	8	18	7
1856	69	2	41	1	25	2	1891	37	0	28	2	20	0
1857	56	4	42	1	25	0	1892	30	3	26	2	19	10
1858	44	2	34	8	24	6	1893	26	4	25	7	18	9
1859	43	9	33	6	23	2	1894	22	10	24	6	17	1
1860	53	3	36	7	24	5	1895	23	1	21	11	14	6
1861	55	4	36	1	23	9	1896	26	2	22	11	14	9
1862	55	5	35	1	22	7	1897	30	2	23	6	16	11
1863	44	9	33	11	21	2	1898	34	0	27	2	18	5
1864	40	2	29	11	20	1	1899	25	8	25	7	17	0
1865	41	10	29	9	21	10	1900	26	11	24	11	17	7
1866	49	11	37	5	24	7	1901	26	9	25	2	18	5
1867	64	5	40	0	26	0	1902	28	1	25	8	20	2
1868	63	9	43	0	28	1	1903	26	9	22	8	17	2
1869	48	2	39	5	26	0	1904	28	4	22	4	16	4
1870	46	11	34	7	22	10	1905	29	8	24	4	17	4
1871	56	8	36	2	25	2	1906	28	3	24	2	18	4
1872	57	0	37	4	23	2	1907	30	7	25	1	18	10
1873	58	8	40	5	25	5	1908	32	0	25	10	17	10
1874	55	9	44	11	28	10	1909	36	11	26	10	18	11
1875	45	2	38	5	28	8	1910	31	8	23	1	17	4
1876	46	2	35	2	26	3	1911	31	8	27	3	18	10
1877	56	9	39	8	25	11	1912	34	9	30	8	21	6
1878	46	5	40	2	24	4	1913	31	8	27	3	19	1
1879	43	10	34	0	21	9	1914	34	11	27	2	20	11
1880	44	4	33	1	23	1	1915	52	10	37	4	30	2
1881	45	4	31	11	21	9	1916	58	5	53	6	33	5
1882	45	1	31	2	21	10	1917	75	9	64	9	49	10
1883	41	7	31	10	21	5	1918	72	10	69	0	49	4
1884	35	8	30	8	20	3	1919	72	11	75	9	52	5

APPENDIX II

AVERAGE CASH WAGES PER WEEK OF ORDINARY AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

From Mr. Wilson Fox's Report on Wages, etc., of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom, 1905. Cd. 2376.
This Table should be compared with prices of British corn.

Year.	England and Wales, 1850–1903 (69 farms).		Eastern Counties of England, 1850–1903 (12 farms).		Year.	England and Wales, 1850–1903 (69 farms).		Eastern Counties of England, 1850–1903 (12 farms).		England and Wales, 1874–1903 (128 farms).	
	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1850	9	3½	8	8	1874	13	7	13	2½	13	11½
1851	9	2½	8	3	1875	13	7	12	11½	14	0
1852	9	3	8	6½	1876	13	8	13	1	14	1½
1853	9	11	9	11½	1877	13	8	12	10½	14	1½
1854	10	8	11	2	1878	13	8	13	0½	14	0½
1855	10	11½	11	5	1879	13	3½	12	5½	13	8½
1856	11	0½	11	5	1880	13	2½	12	1	13	7½
1857	10	11½	10	11	1881	13	2	12	0	13	7½
1858	10	9½	10	5½	1882	13	2½	12	1	13	7½
1859	10	8½	10	2½	1883	13	3	12	0½	13	8
1860	10	11	10	8	1884	13	2½	11	11½	13	7½
1861	11	1	10	10	1885	13	1	11	5	13	5½
1862	11	1	10	7	1886	12	11	11	2½	13	4
1863	11	0	10	1½	1887	12	9½	10	11½	13	2½
1864	11	0½	10	3	1888	12	9½	10	7½	13	2½
1865	11	3	10	5	1889	12	10½	10	11	13	4
1866	11	6	10	1½	1890	13	0½	11	0½	13	6
1867	11	11	11	6½	1891	13	4	11	9½	13	9½
1868	12	0	11	9	1892	13	5	11	8	13	10
1869	11	8½	11	3	1893	13	3½	11	4½	13	9
1870	11	10½	11	1½	1894[1]	13	3	11	1	13	8
1871	12	1	11	7½	1895	13	2½	11	0	13	8½
1872	12	8½	12	4½	1896	13	4	11	1½	13	9
1873	13	4	13	0½	1897	13	5	11	6	13	10½
					1898	13	8½	12	3	14	1½
					1899	13	10½	12	6½	14	4
					1900	14	5½	13	1½	14	10
					1901	14	6½	13	2½	14	11
					1902	14	7	13	2½	14	11½
					1903	14	7	13	2½	11	11½
					1907	14	9 England	12	6[2] Norfolk & Suffolk		

"The Golden Age of English Agriculture."—*English Farming Past and Present*, by R. E. Prothero, p. 370.

"Since 1862 the tide of agricultural prosperity had ceased to flow; after 1874 it turned and rapidly ebbed." Ibid, p. 374.

Note.—Extra earnings per week: Ordinary Labourers, 10d.; Horsemen, 1s. 6d.; Cattlemen, 1s. 8d.; Shepherds, 1s. 10d.

[1] In 1894 wheat dropped to its lowest recorded figure, 22*s.* 10*d.*

[2] Cd. 5460.

APPENDIX III

TABLE SHOWING AVERAGE PRE-WAR WEEKLY EARNINGS OF ORDINARY AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

INCLUDING CASH WAGES, EXTRAS AND ALLOWANCES TOGETHER WITH MINIMUM WEEKLY WAGE AND HOURS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR MALE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS OF 21 YEARS AND UPWARDS ON OCTOBER 6, 1919.

County.	Board of Trade Report, 1907.[1]	Board of Agriculture Enquiry, 1912.	Central Land Association Enquiry, 1912–13.	Rural League Enquiry 1912–13.	Wages Board, October, 1919.		
					Minimum Wage.	Hours.[1]	
						Summer.	Winter.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
NORTHERN COUNTIES.							
Northumberland	—	24 8	24 8	25 0	42 6	50	48
Durham	—	24 8	24 10	25 6			
Cumberland	20 3	18 6	22 6	20 0	40 0	50	48
Westmorland	20 9	15 6	18 0	20 6	40 0	50	48
Average	*20 5*	—	*22 6*	*23 3*			
YORKS, LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE.							
Yorks—East Riding	19 6	—	21 5	—	41 0	50	48
North Riding	19 10	20 10	21 7	—			
West Riding	20 2	20 2	22 1	—			
Whole County	19 10	—	21 8	20 8			
Lancashire	20 8	22 0	22 0	21 5	39 6	50	48
Cheshire	19 1	18 8	19 6	20 2	39 0	50	48
Average	*19 9*	—	*21 1*	*20 9*	—	—	—
NORTH AND WEST MIDLAND COUNTIES.							
Leicestershire	18 9	—	19 1	19 8	37 6	50	48
Rutland	17 0	17 1	20 3	20 0	37 6	50	48
Lincolnshire	19 5	17 6	21 3	19 8	40 6	50	48
Nottinghamshire	19 5	19 5	20 9	18 7	38 0	50	48
Derbyshire	20 10	22 6	20 9	25 3	37 6	50	48
Gloucestershire	16 3	—	17 5	16 6	36 6	50	48
Herefordshire	17 1	17 9	20 0	17 6	36 6	50	48
Shropshire	18 2	18 0	20 0	19 10	37 0	50	48
Staffordshire	18 10	19 6	20 2	19 6	38 6	50	48
Worcestershire	16 3	16 0	16 6	17 11	36 6	50	48
Warwickshire	17 2	17 1	20 2	17 4	36 6	50	48
Average	*18 4*	—	*19 8*	*19 2*	—	—	—
SOUTH MIDLAND AND EASTERN COUNTIES.							
Middlesex	20 3	—	21 6	21 3	40 6	50	48
Hertfordshire	16 10	16 3	18 9	17 9	38 6	50	48
Buckinghamshire	16 11	—	18 0	18 3	36 6	50	48
Oxfordshire	14 11	—	17 0	15 5	36 6	50	48
Northamptonshire	16 9	—	18 2	17 3	36 6	50	48
Huntingdonshire	16 2	—	19 0	16 6	36 6	50	48
Bedfordshire	16 3	—	17 6	16 3	36 6	50	48
Cambridgeshire	16 3	—	19 9	16 4	36 6	50	48
Essex	16 4	—	19 0	16 6	38 6	50	48
Suffolk	15 9	—	18 0	16 0	36 6	50	48
Norfolk	15 4	15 11	17 6	16 7	36 6	50	48
Average	*16 1*	—	*18 6*	*17 0*	—	—	—
SOUTH EASTERN COUNTIES.							
Surrey	18 9	—	19 7	18 10	39 6	50	48
Kent	18 10	—	21 10	21 2	39 6	50	48
Sussex	17 9	—	19 2	18 2	38 6	50	48
Hampshire	17 5	—	18 11	16 10	37 6	50	48
Berkshire	16 8	—	18 9	16 10	36 6	50	48
Average	*18 1*	—	*19 7*	*18 4*	—	—	—
SOUTH WESTERN COUNTIES.							
Wiltshire	16 0	—	17 2	17 3	36 6	50	48
Dorsetshire	16 1	—	17 7	17 0	36 6	50	48
Devonshire	17 9	18 7	19 0	17 2	37 6	50	48
Cornwall	17 7	18 3	17 0	19 2	37 6	50	48
Somersetshire	17 3	17 4	18 6	18 3	36 6	50	48
Average	*16 10*	—	*17 10*	*17 9*	—	—	—
AVERAGE FOR ENGLAND	17 6	—	19 10	—	37 6	50	48

[1] For purposes of comparison these wages are based on a uniform working week of 50 and 48 hours, though higher rates were allowed where the statutory hours were longer.

WEEKLY CASH WAGES, ALLOWANCES AND EARNINGS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN WALES

All Classes

County.	Cash Wages.		Allowances and Extra Earnings.		Total Earnings.		Wages Board. October, 1919.		
	Board of Trade, 1907.	Central Land Association, 1912–13.	Board of Trade, 1907.	Central Land Association. 1912–13	Board of Trade, 1907.	Central Land Association, 1912–13.	Minimum Wage.	Summer.	Winter.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
Flintshire . .	15 11	18 0	2 11	3 8	18 10	21 8	36 6	50	48
Denbighshire .	13 11	20 0	4 2	4 6	18 1	24 6	36 6	50	48
Carnarvon . .	13 10	17 6	4 9	3 0	18 7	20 6	36 6	50	48
Anglesey . .	11 9	16 6	5 9	3 3	17 6	19 9	36 6	50	48
Merionethshire.	13 3	14 3	4 11	7 6	18 2	21 9	36 6	50	48
Montgomeryshire	12 8	18 1	3 11	3 1	16 7	21 2	36 6	50	48
Cardiganshire .	11 6	15 9	5 0	1 6	16 6	17 3	37 6	50	48
Radnorshire .	11 1	10 0	5 7	7 6	16 8	17 6	36 6	50	48
Brecknockshire.	14 7	13 10	4 2	5 6	18 9	19 4	36 6	50	48
Carmarthenshire	13 9	19 1	4 4	5 0	18 1	24 1	37 6	50	48
Pembrokeshire.	12 9	9 10	4 6	8 6	17 3	18 4	37 6	50	48
Glamorganshire	15 8	19 5	3 7	3 3	19 3	22 8	41 6	50	48
Monmouthshire	14 9	17 3	3 4	1 10	18 1	19 1	41 6	50	48
Average for Wales.	13 9	16 2	4 3	4 5	18 0	20 7	37 6	50	48

Note.—In some cases the Minimum Wage applies to all classes. In others higher rates are allowed for horsemen, shepherds, etc.,

APPENDIX IV

MINIMUM RATES OF WAGES (APRIL 19, 1920) IN FORCE FOR MALE WORKERS, 21 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

In the areas of the District Wages Committees for :—	Minimum Rates.	Overtime Rates.		Hours per week for Employment.	
		On Week-days.	On Sundays.	In Summer.	In Winter.
Berkshire Buckinghamshire Brecon and Radnor Cornwall Derbyshire Devonshire Dorset Hampshire Herefordshire Leicestershire and Rutland Northamptonshire (including the Soke of Peterborough) Nottinghamshire Oxfordshire Pembroke, Carmarthen and Cardigan Shropshire Somerset Wiltshire Worcestershire	s. d. 42 0	s. d. 1 1	s. d. 1 3½	50	48

In the areas of the District Wages Committees for :—	Minimum Rates.	Overtime Rates. On Weekdays.	Overtime Rates. On Sundays.	Hours per week for Employment. In Summer.	Hours per week for Employment. In Winter.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
Staffordshire	42 6	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Sussex					
Kent	43 6	1 1	1 4	50	48
Lancashire (excluding the Furness District)					
Surrey					
Lincolnshire	44 6	1 1½	1 4	50	48
Yorkshire	45 0	1 1½	1 4½	50	48
Glamorgan and Monmouth	45 6	1 2	1 4½	50	48
Anglesey and Carnarvon — Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Horsemen, Cowmen, Shepherds, or Hwsmyn (Bailiffs)	54 0	1 1	1 3½	61	58
Anglesey and Carnarvon — Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Cambridgeshire (including Isle of Ely) Huntingdonshire and Bedfordshire — Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Horsekeepers, Cowmen or Shepherds, other than workers employed solely as Stockmen and Yardmen	52 6	1 1	1 3½	59	57
Cambridgeshire (including Isle of Ely) Huntingdonshire and Bedfordshire — Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Cheshire .. .. .. — Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Head Stockmen, Head Teamsmen or Head Shepherds ..	*52 0	1 2½	1 5½	54	
Cheshire .. .. .. — Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Second Stockmen, Second Teamsmen, or Second Shepherds ..	*50 0	1 2	1 4½	54	
Cheshire .. .. .. — Other classes of workmen	*48 0	1 1½	1 4	54	

*Proposal May 20, 1920.

In the areas of the District Wages Committees for :—		Minimum Rates.	Overtime Rates.		Hours per week for Employment.	
			On Week-days.	On Sundays.	In Summer.	In Winter.
		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
Cumberland and Westmorland (including the Furness District of Lancashire)	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Horsemen, Cattlemen or Shepherds with the addition in the case of a workman of any of these classes who has been so employed for a full half yearly term (expiring at Whitsuntide or Martinmas) of a further sum equal to the amount of his minimum wage specified	60 0	1 1½	1 4	63	63
	Other classes of workmen	44 0	1 1½	1 4	50	48
Denbigh and Flint ..	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Team-men, Cattlemen, Cowmen, Shepherds or Bailiffs	54 0	1 1	1 3½	61	58
	Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Essex	Workmen employed wholly or mainly in connection with the use of land for a market garden under a contract of service or apprenticeship with an employer who is engaged in the trade or business of market gardening	46 6	1 1	1 3½	50	48
	Other classes of workmen	42 6	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Gloucestershire	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Horsemen	52 6	1 1	1 3½	58	60
	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Stockmen or Shepherds	54 0	1 1	1 3½	60	60
	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Under Horsemen	48 6	1 1	1 3½	54	57
	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Under Stockmen or Under Shepherds	51 0	1 1	1 3½	57	57
	Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48

In the areas of the District Wages Committees for :—		Minimum Rates.	Overtime Rates.		Hours per week for Employment.	
			On Week-days.	On Sundays.	In Summer.	In Winter.
		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
Merioneth and Montgomery	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Stockmen, Teamsters, Carters or Shepherds	48 6	1 1	1 3½	56	53
	Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Northumberland and Durham	Workmen employed as whole-time Shepherds or wholly in tending sheep	58 0	Customary in the area			
	Other classes of workmen	46 6	1 2	1 5	50	48
Warwickshire	All classes of workmen*	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Norfolk	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Teamsmen, Cowmen or Shepherds ..	42 0 with the additional and inclusive weekly sum of 8s. 6d. in respect of employment which is excluded from ranking as overtime employment	1 1	1 3½	50	48
	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Sheep-tenders or Bullock-tenders ..	42 0 with, during the period of the year during which the workman is so employed, the additional and inclusive weekly sum of 7s. 6d. in respect of employment which is excluded from ranking as overtime employment	1 1	1 3½	50	48
	Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48

* Order dates from May 1920.

In the areas of the District Wages Committees for :—		Minimum Rates.	Overtime Rates. On Week-days.	Overtime Rates. On Sundays.	Hours per Week for Employment. In Summer.	Hours per Week for Employment. In Winter.
		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.		
Suffolk	Workmen employed wholly or mainly as Horsemen, Stockmen or Shepherds, whose whole time is occupied in looking after a flock of breeding sheep ..	42 0 with the additional and inclusive weekly sum of 9s. in respect of employment which is excluded from ranking as overtime employment,*	1 1	1 3½	50	48
	Other classes of workmen	42 0	1 1	1 3½	50	48
Hertfordshire and Middlesex	(1) That part of the area comprising the administrative county of Hertford	42 6	1 1	1 3½	50	48
	(2) That part of the area comprising the administrative county of Middlesex, the city of London and those parts of the administrative county of London (except the parts of the metropolitan borough of Woolwich) which lie north of the River Thames ..	44 6	1 1½	1 4	50	48

Note :—"The Board resolved to give notice of a Proposal to increase the minimum and overtime rates for male workers under the age of 21 years throughout the country, the proposed increases in the weekly minimum rates varying generally in the case of workers aged 20 to 21 from 3/6 to 5/- according to the area, for workers aged 19 to 20 from 3/- to 4/-, and for workers aged 18 to 19 from 2/6 to 3/6, with proportionate increases for workers under the age of 18.

"The Board also decided to give Notice of Proposal to increase the minimum rates for female workers of all ages. In the case of female workers, the minimum rates are on an hourly basis, and the Board's Proposal is to increase the rate for workers aged 18 and over from 6d. to 7d. per hour in all areas except Somerset and Yorkshire, where the proposed rate would be 8d. per hour. Proportionate increases are proposed for female workers under the age of 18, together with consequential adjustments of the overtime rates for all ages."—*Agricultural Wages Board*, April 9, 1920. Cyclo No. 3091. †

* This order dates from May 3, 1920.

† Order came into operation May 31, 1920, with the alteration of Yorkshire female workers being paid 10*d.* an hour.

The Agricultural Wages Board on June 3, 1920, decided to issue a proposal for consideration by District Wages Committees for a further increase, making the minimum wage 46s. per week.

APPENDIX V

STATEMENT SHOWING CHANGES IN COST OF THE UNDERMENTIONED ITEMS OF WORKMEN'S EXPENDITURE IN LONDON AND LARGE TOWNS IN GREAT BRITAIN (COST IN 1900 = 100).

EXTRACTED FROM SECOND SERIES OF "MEMORANDA, STATISTICAL TABLES AND CHARTS." Cd. 2337 of 1904.

Year.	Food.	Rent.[1]	Clothing.	Fuel and Lighting	Cost of the Four Items.
1880 . .	142·3	86·6	108·5[2]	74·1	121·7
1881 . .	140·2	87·3	108·5	77·0	120·8
1882 . .	140·1	88·0	107·5	73·0	120·4
1883 . .	139·9	88·7	105·1	75·7	120·2
1884 . .	127·9	89·4	102·7	75·1	112·9
1885 . .	116·2	90·1	102·1	75·1	106·1
1886 . .	110·3	90·1	102·2	73·2	102·5
1887 . .	104·9	90·0	102·2	71·5	99·2
1888 . .	104·6	90·0	100·8	72·9	98·9
1889 . .	108·3	89·9	100·4	73·9	101·1
1890 . .	106·3	89·9	101·8	79·6	100·6
1891 . .	108·8	91·2	101·9	78·2	102·2
1892 . .	108·9	92·5	101·0	77·7	102·3
1893 . .	103·1	93·7	100·3	84·5	99·5
1894 . .	100·0	95·0	99·1	73·4	96·8
1895 . .	95·0	96·3	97·8	71·3	93·7
1896 . .	91·0	97·0	98·6	72·1	91·7
1897 . .	97·6	97·8	98·2	72·6	95·7
1898 . .	103·9	98·5	97·0	73·3	99·3
1899 . .	97·4	99·3	96·2	79·5	96·0
1900 . .	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
1901 . .	105·1	100·7	100·6	90·2	102·4
1902 . .	102·6	101·5	99·9	87·2	100·7
1903 . .	104·3	102·2	99·7	82·5	101·4

[1] In the case of rent only the figures for 1880, 1885, 1890, 1895 and 1900 are ascertained data. The intermediate figures are interpolated on the assumption that the average level of rents within each five year period changed at a uniform rate. For 1901–3 the rate of increase between 1895 and 1900 has been assumed to have continued.

[2] Figure for 1881 has been used, earlier information not being available.

APPENDIX VI

PERCENTAGE CHANGES IN AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE OF FOOD IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, TO A WORKMAN'S FAMILY (Average Price in 1900 = 100).

Extracted from "Memoranda, Statistical Tables, and Charts bearing on British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions." Cd. 1761 of 1903.

Year.		Year.		Year.	
1877	143	1886	105	1894	95
1878	134	1887	100	1895	91
1879	128	1888	100	1896	87
1880	136	1889	104	1897	94
1881	133	1890	102	1898	100
1882	133	1891	104	1899	93
1883	133	1892	104	1900	96
1884	122	1893	98	1901	100
1885	111				

PERCENTAGE CHANGES BETWEEN 1905 AND 1912 IN RENTS, RETAIL PRICES, AND RENTS AND RETAIL PRICES COMBINED IN LONDON AND 87 LARGE TOWNS.

Extracted from "Seventeenth Abstract of Labour Statistics." Cd. 7733 of 1915.

Geographical Group.	Mean Percentage Increase (+) or Decrease (−) in		
	Rents.	Retail Prices.	Rents and Retail Prices Combined.
London Area { Middle Zone	−4	+12	+9
London Area { Inner Zone	−6	+12	+8
London Area { Outer Zone	−2	+10	+8
Northern Counties and Cleveland	+0·7	+13·2	+10·7
Yorkshire (except Cleveland)	+1·3	+14·0	+11·5
Lancashire and Cheshire	+3·4	+15·8	+13·3
Midlands	+0·4	+14·4	+11·6
Eastern and East Midland Counties	+3·1	+12·4	+10·5
Southern Counties	+1·2	+ 9·8	+ 8·1
Wales and Monmouth	+4·3	+15·0	+12·9
Scotland	+1·9	+13·1	+10·9
Ireland	+1·2	+15·0	+12·2

ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE INCREASE, ON THE PRICES OF JULY, 1914, IN THE RETAIL PRICES OF FOOD.

Extracted from the "Labour Gazette."

Date.	Increase per cent.
January 1st, 1915	18
January 1st, 1916	45
January 1st, 1917	87
January 1st, 1918	106
January 1st, 1919	130
January 1st, 1920	136

APPENDIX VII

NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS, SHEPHERDS, NURSERYMEN, GARDENERS, ETC., IN ENGLAND AND WALES AND GREAT BRITAIN, AS RETURNED AT THE CENSUS OF 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 AND 1911 RESPECTIVELY.

		1871.	1881.
Agricultural Labourers (incl. cattlemen and horsemen .	England and Wales	798,087	847,953
	Great Britain .	891,185	983,919
Shepherds	England and Wales	23,323	22,844
	Great Britain . .	31,675	33,125
Nurserymen, Seedsmen, Florists Market Gardeners, Other Gardeners (incl. Domestic Gardeners)	England and Wales	103,564	148,285
	Great Britain . .	112,490	163,621

		1891.	1901	1911.
Agricultural Labourers incl. cattlemen and horsemen)	England and Wales	759,134	595,702	635,493
	Great Britain . .	866,546	689,292	722,031
Shepherds . . .	England and Wales	21,573	25,366	20,844
	Great Britain . .	31,686	35,022	29,885
Nurserymen, Seedsmen, Florists, Market Gardeners, other Gardeners (incl. Domestic Gardeners)	England and Wales	179,336	216,165	263,147
	Great Britain . .	195,721	235,971	284,830

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